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Echoes of Rachel's Weeping: Intertextuality and Trauma in Jer. 31:15

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Abstract

The image of Rachel's inconsolable weeping for her lost children in Jer. 31:15 presents a specific kind of response to a cultural trauma. As this paper argues, understanding this response is enriched both by analyzing the extra-textual literary strategy of the passage itself and by engaging in an intertextual reading of the ancient text with a contemporary artistic response to trauma. By means of an allusion to Genesis 37, Jer. 31:15 makes a case both for the continued existence of the people of Israel and for the legitimacy of experiencing the exile as a metaphorical death. What Jer. 31:15 accomplishes textually for a sixth century BCE Judean audience, the *Witness Blanket* accomplishes in a visual medium for threatened Canadian native cultures. Both texts stage a protest against the threat to the continued existence of culture by asserting the persistent potency of its cultural symbols.

Keywords

Allusion – exile – intertextuality – Jeremiah – trauma – *Witness Blanket*

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A voice is heard in Ramah,
wailing, bitter weeping
Rachel is weeping for her children

she has refused to be comforted for her children
for they are no more.

(JER. 31:15)



Since ancient times, readers of this text have found in it particularly fruitful imagery and language for describing the experience of lamentation and suffering. Matthew 2:16-17 appropriates this text as part of a critique of the violent abuse of royal power.¹ For the Matthean author, Rachel's poetic lament finds fulfillment in Herod's slaughter of the innocents. Rabbinic sources also found this text productive for imagining the ritual of lament (*Gen. Rab.* 82:10; *Lam. Rab.* proem 24; *Pesiq. Rab.*).² Because of these textual afterlives, contemporary readers of Jer. 31:15 potentially face the problem of familiarity. Whether familiar or not, all contemporary readers face the problem of the text's foreignness and antiquity. Such a text, paradoxically both familiar and ancient, presents a distinct challenge for readers. Traditional biblical critical scholarship – with its historicist focus on origins and sources – and postmodern reader-focused strategies address the challenge in very different ways. These approaches, however, may not be mutually exclusive, and a combination of methods can provide fresh traction on the reading of this text.

In its reference to the legendary ancestor Rachel, the Jeremian text appears self-consciously extra-textual in its orientation. This orientation invites the reader to look for meaning beyond the text itself. This paper responds to this invitation by proposing a reading that combines the contours of poststructuralist intertextuality with a more traditional biblical critical analysis of inner-biblical allusion.

Poststructural Intertextuality, Literary Allusion, and Trauma

In reading a text like Jer. 31:15, intertextuality has the potential to challenge readers to bridge the temporal, spatial, and cultural distance between themselves and the text by understanding the text's participation in a shared human experience of the world.

1 See, for example, E. Park, "Rachel's Cry for Her Children: Matthew's Treatment of the Infanticide by Herod," *CBQ* 75 (2013), pp. 473-85.

2 S.E. Brown-Guttoff, "The Voice of Rachel in Jeremiah 31: A Calling to 'Something New,'" *USQR* 45 (1991), pp. 177-90 (180-182).

In its origin, intertextuality is a concept that was developed in poststructuralist circles. Poststructuralists such as Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, and Tzvetan Todorov did not search for the meaning of a text by investigating its author's intentions or the text's own structures, but by exploring the many possible dialogues of a text with other texts and contexts.³ Gary Philipps summarizes well this original form of intertextuality:

Poststructural intertextualists operate with diverse and expanded views of text, textuality context, and interpretation. Texts are social products imbedded in culture, and critical reading is a social praxis that intervenes in various ways in the text and the social world. By contesting notions of autonomous text, fixed meaning, and neutral reading, poststructural intertextualists privilege instability of texts, indeterminacy of meaning, the socially constructed roles of writers/readers, and the ethical urgency of interpretation. Poststructural intertextuality aims to expose unacknowledged structures, values, and forces that shape readers and the material worlds where both readers and texts live. In contrast to traditional critical practices marked by closure and boundaries, poststructural intertextuality aggressively opens text and reader to the outside. Transformation of text, reader, understanding, and world is the goal.⁴

This concept provides a methodological framework that can be used to explore the intersection between text, art culture, and society. In this way, intertextuality cannot be reduced to a problem of sources or influences.⁵ In contrast to traditional critical practices in biblical studies, poststructural intertextuality opens both text and readers to outside influences and to the extra-textual world. Poststructural intertextuality drives readers from their social worlds towards other texts, contexts, and other social worlds in a transformative way.⁶

3 J. Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); R. Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970); J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

4 G.A. Phillips, "Poststructural Intertextuality," in B.J. Oropez and Steve Moyise (eds.), *Exploring Intertextuality: Diverse Strategies for New Testament Interpretation of Texts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), pp. 106-127 (106).

5 "Intertextuality is nothing less than the textual shape of how culture, history, and society are engraved in texts. This concept transcends a text-immanent structuralism and shows how texts are mirrors or echoes of the world" (U. Luz, "Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew," *HTR* 97 (2004), pp. 119-37 (120).

6 As Jonathan Culler writes: "Intertextuality ... [is] less a name for a work's relation to prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture" (*The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981], p. 103.

From this perspective, poststructural intertextual reading opens Jeremiah's poem and its readers to a plethora of narratives, art forms, and even to real mothers who cry inconsolably for children who are no more. Intertextual reading so envisioned has a strong ethical component that intends to unsettle readers, moving them to action.

From this methodological perspective, we propose to read Jeremiah alongside an artwork created in the wake of a tragedy from our recent North American context. "The *Witness Blanket* stands as a national monument to recognise the atrocities of the Indian Residential School era, honour the children, and symbolise ongoing reconciliation."⁷ Our intertextual work will interpret an ancient biblical text that evokes a metaphorical narrative violence towards children by taking into account the violence and death of real children in contemporary living memory.

This intertextual perspective certainly goes beyond biblical criticism's traditional focus on sources and influences, but a thick description of a text may productively embrace a combination of both reader and author-centered approaches. Within biblical studies, some of the most programmatic observations on the study of allusion as a diachronic literary trope appear in Benjamin Sommer's monograph, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*.⁸ Sommer explicitly distinguishes the study of allusion – a literary trope in which an earlier text is reused by a later text for a variety of reasons – from poststructural intertextuality. For Sommer, these two approaches inhabit separate universes of discourse. In its focus on the reader's role in the production of meaning, intertextuality is in danger of overlooking specific literary tropes that contributed to the formation of texts.

The reference in Jer. 31:15 to the legendary ancestor Rachel represents a fairly clear case of a text creating meaning by explicitly pointing outside itself. An analysis of allusion, if it can be sustained, would appear especially appropriate in such a case. As this paper will show, Jer. 31:15 does, indeed, allude to a specific element of the Genesis narrative. Somewhat surprisingly, it is not to a story of Rachel herself that this passage alludes. It alludes, rather, to a story that describes her husband, Jacob, and his response to the supposed death of his son (Genesis 37). Tracing the interpretive process sheds light on the text, but it does not adequately describe what is at stake in the allusive deployment of the Genesis story. For contemporary readers, the temporal and cultural distance

7 The web page devoted to this artwork presents it in those words; accessible at <<http://witnessblanket.ca/#!/project/>>.

8 B. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Contraversions; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 6-10.

between the producers of ancient texts and ourselves can effectively silence the very voices we seek to explicate. An intertextual reading strategy that juxtaposes the *Witness Blanket* to Jer. 31:15 provides a new way of giving voice to the text.

The motivation for reading Jer. 31:15 and the *Witness Blanket* side by side arises first of all from the fact that both represent responses to trauma. As such, in addition to intertextuality and inner-biblical allusion, trauma theory provides an important perspective on our reading. Though much research on trauma focuses on the experiences of individuals, other studies on trauma have shown the potential for a whole culture to experience a kind of “cultural trauma” when an “original” culture suffers threat of loss at the imposition of an “arriving” culture.⁹ As this paper will show, both the imagined lament of Rachel in Jer. 31:15 and the visual art of the *Witness Blanket* represent responses to disruptions of culture. In both cases, survivors of a cultural trauma seek a revitalization of culture through the artful activation of traditions supporting cultural identity. This lens of trauma opens up the allusive literary strategy of Jer. 31:15 to an intertextual reading alongside the *Witness Blanket*. Literary and visual art provide ways of both giving voice to mourning and articulating a vision of a continued existence.

Rachel's Weeping and Genesis 37: Allusion as Response to Trauma

Our reading of Jer. 31:15 turns first to its own literary and historical context. Though much of the book of Jeremiah focuses on divine judgment in the form of the Neo-Babylonian conquest and destruction of Judah, a collection of oracles in Jeremiah 30-33 articulate the possibility of a restoration following this national disaster.¹⁰ These texts can thus be described as representations of an

9 B.H. Stamm, H.E. Stamm IV, A.C. Hudnall, C. Higson-Smith, “Considering a Theory of Cultural Trauma and Loss,” *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 9 (2003), pp. 89-111.

10 There is some debate on whether some passages within this collection – especially those that refer to Ephraim (Jer. 31:6, 9, 18, 20) – in fact address the fall of the northern kingdom (see summaries of views in W. McKane, *Jeremiah XXVI-LII* [1CC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996], 784-86, 797-98; and W. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 186-87). B. Lindars argues that these references derive from a reuse of Hosea involving a redeployment of material originally addressed to the northern kingdom for a Judean audience (“Rachel Weeping for Her Children” – Jeremiah 31:15-22,” *JSTOT* 12 [1979], pp. 47-62). The dominance of the exilic Judean audience elsewhere in the book would indeed commend seeing it here. The name “Ephraim” in this context is used for the southern kingdom, which has now faced the same fate as its northern neighbor. Further, as McKane points out, even if these verses originally addressed a northern context, they

attempt to respond to and overcome a cultural trauma. In the midst of such profound disruptions as forced migration and the loss of land, autonomy, and cult, these texts articulate the possibility of the community's survival.

Within this context, Rachel's weeping in Jer. 31:15 marks an overtly extra-textual reference. This legendary ancestor plays no other role in the context of Jeremiah 31 or, for that matter, in the entire prophetic corpus. This extra-textual referentiality is an invitation to the reader to draw associations from their sense of who Rachel was and what she represented. Since our own sense of the ancient traditions about Rachel derives from the book of Genesis, it is reasonable to ask whether Jer. 31:15 has a specific textual referent in Genesis. If the literary strategy here includes an allusion to a particular passage, the explication of that interpretive process will give traction on precisely how this passage functions as a response to trauma.

The analysis of allusion, however, faces significant challenges. In the introduction to *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Michael Fishbane rightly warns against positing diachronic interpretive activity in passages that refer to traditions known from elsewhere, especially when nothing else concrete connects the two passages.¹¹ Thus, for instance, prophetic evocations of Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa. 1:9, 10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer. 23:14; 29:18; 50:10; Ezek. 18:46-56; Amos 4:11; Zeph. 2:9), or the similarities of Genesis-narratives concerning a wife in danger are not sufficient for establishing literary dependence. In each case, it is possible that two or more texts access a shared tradition independently and apart from a literary manifestation of that tradition. The initially common sense assumption that the author of Jer. 31:15 had the narratives from Genesis in mind, therefore, is in fact in need of support beyond the bare mention of the matriarch, Rachel. Justifying a claim for literary allusion requires more than broadly similar themes or tropes; it requires the identification of some kind of recognizable marker that has been taken from a source text and redeployed in the alluding text.¹²

With these cautions in place, this paper will argue that Jer. 31:15 alludes to the story of her husband Jacob's response to the supposed death of Joseph

have been deployed in a post-exilic context in which Judah, and especially Zion, is the central focus (*Jeremiah XXVI-LII*, p. 803). The argument of this paper, however, is not seriously affected if an alternate view is taken. Our analysis of the use of literary allusion as a response to cultural trauma functions whether the text is a response to the Neo-Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom or the Neo-Babylonian conquest of the southern.

11 M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p. 8.

12 See Z. Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL* 1 (1976), pp. 108-110; C. Perri, "On Alluding," *Poetics* 7 (1978), pp. 295-296; and the appropriation of this approach in Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, pp. 10-13.

(Gen. 37:33-35). Deceived by his other sons, Jacob mourns inconsolably for the death of a son who is not actually dead. In alluding to this story, Jer. 31:15 capitalizes on the motif of the mistaken nature of Jacob's mourning. According to Jer. 31:15, the poetically invoked Rachel also mourns under a mistaken view of the Neo-Babylonian conquest and exile. Her represented lament gives voice to the possibility of experiencing the exile as a metaphorical death of the people. Several other biblical texts, including especially Ezekiel's vision of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) similarly voice this way of experiencing the Neo-Babylonian conquest. For Ezekiel, the exile is like the death of the people; restoration, therefore, can only be pictured as a kind of afterlife. Like Ezekiel 37, Jer. 31:15-17 addresses this exile-as-death perspective and opposes to it its own view of the exile as a temporary and transitional period in the history of Judah. As part of a response to trauma, this allusion can therefore be understood as an effort at articulating a metaphor for cultural survival rather than death.

The Dynamics of an Allusion

The sudden mention of Rachel in Jer. 31:15 directs the reader to look outside the immediately literary context. But where should a reader look? A glance at the narrative traditions about Rachel does not yield much that would seem to inform how we understand the reference. As told in Genesis 29-35, Rachel is the second and favored wife of Jacob and daughter of Laban. She stole gods from her father and on one occasion "sold" Jacob to Leah in exchange for mandrakes. Within the genealogical storyline, she is notable as the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, and through Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. Rachel's story ends with the birth of Benjamin and her own death and burial on the side of the road. Some interpreters have connected the image of Rachel's weeping in Jeremiah 31 with this childbirth death,¹³ but the connection between Rachel's death in Genesis and her weeping in Jeremiah 31 do not appear relatable in any direct way. In the death story, Rachel suffers and dies; in Jeremiah 31 she does not mourn for her own demise, but for that of her offspring. Rachel seems to be a strange choice to serve as a representative figure imagined as mourning for

13 See, for example, F.A. Nieder Jr., "Rachel's Lament," *Word & World* 22 (2002), pp. 406-414 (409). Others have imagined a folk tradition about the haunting of the ancestor's ghost, but, as Konrad Schmid points out, these readings make unwarranted assumptions about a text that is readable without them. See Schmid, *Buchgestalten Jeremiasbuches: Untersuchungen zur Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Jer 30-33 im Kontext des Buches* (WMZANT, 72; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), pp. 132-33.

the departed exiles. Without any particular links to her story, we have to ask why Rachel – rather than some other ancestral figure – is featured in this text.

A partial answer to this question may appear in the tradition of Rachel's burial. According to Genesis 35, Rachel is buried apart from the other ancestors on the side of the road to Ephratah. A gloss in v. 19 clarifies the toponym as an alternate name for Bethlehem. The following verse notes that Jacob set up a pillar at her grave, and that this landmark is known as the pillar of the grave of Rachel עַד הַיּוֹם ("up to today"). The fact that this text makes reference to an apparently known landmark cautions us, however, from necessarily connecting the Jeremiah text to Genesis 35. Indeed, 1 Sam. 10:2 refers to a similar landmark, though in a different location: "You will find two men at the grave of Rachel at the border of Benjamin." The difference in the location of Rachel's monument is difficult to explain with any certainty;¹⁴ it may simply be that there were conflicting local claims about the location of the grave. However it is explained, this tradition from Samuel appears to shed light on Jer. 31:15, which locates the weeping of Rachel in Ramah, a town on the border of Benjamin.¹⁵ Furthermore, in Jer. 40:1, Ramah appears again as the place where the exiles were gathered before departing for Babylon. The selection of Rachel, therefore, appears plausibly explained by the presence of her monument in the landscape and the proximity of this monument to a significant waypoint for those subjected to forced migration.¹⁶

The development of this image in the following verses is significant. Rachel's mourning is immediately followed with a prophetic word of comfort: "thus says Yahweh, withhold your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares Yahweh. They will return from an enemy's land. And there is hope for your future, declares Yahweh, children will return to their border" (Jer. 31:16-17). These verses make two important claims about Rachel's weeping. First, it is efficacious. The promised restoration is here figured as "reward" (שָׂכָר) for the "work" (פְּעֻלָּתְךָ) of inconsolable mourning. Second, these verses assert paradoxically that Rachel's mourning is predicated on a mistaken apprehension of exile. Rachel weeps because

¹⁴ See, for example, B.D. Cox and S. Ackerman, "Rachel's tomb," *JBL* 128 (2009), pp. 135-48.

¹⁵ With the exception of Neh. 11:33, the place name Ramah is elsewhere consistently written with a definite article. The lack of definite article here presents the possibility of seeing the reference to a more generalized "high place" rather than a specific locale (Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, pp. 186-87). Due to the presence of the preposition ב, the presence or absence of the definite article is not represented in the consonantal text. The LXX reads the place name Ραμα, and Neh. 11:33 shows that the definite article is not mandatory. Schmid suggests that the vocalization without the definite article could be influenced by the use of the simple noun רַמָּה in Ezek. 16:24-25 (*Buchgestalten*, pp. 131-132).

¹⁶ See Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, pp. 132-33.

her children are “no more” (כִּי אֵינָנוּ), yet the prophet asserts their continued existence: sons will return to their border (וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגְבוּלָם).

In his discussion of this passage, Robert Carroll highlights this tension between Rachel's lament and the response. As Carroll points out, vv. 16-17 deal “with the return of exiled children, whereas v. 15 is about the death of the mother's children. Her children no longer exist, and that is why she refuses to be comforted. It is not a case of her children having gone away but of their annihilation.”¹⁷ Carroll then concludes that “the fragment constituted by v. 15 does not fit the context, and would be better treated by exegetes as an independent poem.”¹⁸ For Carroll, the composition of this passage juxtaposes different poems whose combination achieves its own kind of rhetorical unity while obscuring the original meaning of each.

While it may not be necessary to resort to source divisions of this text, the interpretive irritant that Carroll highlights is important. Why invoke Rachel as a mourner only to imply that her mourning is mistaken? The answer to this question requires the recognition of the allusion. In Genesis 37, Joseph, one of Rachel's sons, manages to antagonize his brothers so thoroughly that they conspire to get rid of him and fake his death. Upon hearing the news of Joseph's supposed death, his father Jacob is inconsolable. According to verses 34-35: “Jacob tore his garment and put on sackcloth. He mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, ‘surely I will go down to my son, to Sheol, in mourning.’ And he wept for his son.”

Jeremiah 31:15 builds an allusion to this passage through a combination of lexical and thematic parallels. The shared use of the root בכה to describe someone weeping for departed child is hardly unique enough to support an allusion. More distinctive is the language used for refusing to be comforted. The verb לִמְאֵן, “to refuse,” followed by an infinitive form of נָחַם, “to be comforted,” appears only in these two passages and Ps. 77:3.¹⁹ This distinct pattern marks the external text (Genesis 37) in such a way that it is recognizable. The combination of this distinctive phrase with the theme of a weeping patriarch functions in Jer. 31:15 to mark the story of Jacob's mourning for Joseph.

17 R.P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 597.

18 Carroll, *Jeremiah* p. 597. See also Lindars, “Jeremiah 31:15-22,” p. 53, where Lindars cautiously suggests that v. 15 was composed in reference to the events of 722 BCE and vv. 16-17 to those of 586 BCE.

19 This allusion has been also noted by Brown-Guttoff, “The Voice of Rachel”; Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, pp. 133-34; G. Fischer, *Jeremia 26-52* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2005), p. 157; and M. Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform and Jeremiah's Scroll: Historical Calamity and Prophetic Response* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2006), p. 83 n. 48

Further support can be seen in the use of the term אִינּוֹ, “he is not.” In Jer. 31:15, the suffix’s antecedent is the plural בְּנֵיהָ, “her sons.” The sudden shift to the singular requires explanation. Indeed, the Septuagint, along with other translations both ancient and modern, ignore the number of the suffix and render it with a plural.²⁰ This grammatical problem finds an explanation in the proposed allusion to the Joseph narrative, where the clause אִינּוֹ, “he is not,” repeatedly describes Joseph. This appears both in the immediate context of Gen. 37:35 in v. 30 and subsequently in the narrative in 42:13, 32, and 36.

The narrative thus establishes a parallel between the metaphorical Rachel, present at the site of the departure of exiles, and the story of Jacob’s mourning for Joseph. As Ben-Porat has pointed out, allusions are by their nature metonymic; they invoke a whole text by marking only a part.²¹ As such, once an allusion is marked, the reader is invited to explore further associations. It is in these further associations that the apparent tension between v. 15 and vv. 16-17 is resolved. Read in light of Genesis 37, the allusion in vv. 15-17 suggests that Rachel similarly mourns under a misapprehension of the nature of the child’s absence. Jacob mistakenly believed his son to be dead and resolved to mourn him inconsolably only later to discover to his delight that Joseph’s absence was not the absence of death. Rather than betraying a literary seam, as Carroll suggests, the apparent tension between the image of Rachel mourning for perished children and the children not actually being dead is a central element of the allusion to Genesis 37.

By correlating Rachel with her husband Jacob, and the exiles from Judah with Joseph, Jer. 31:15 enlists the Genesis story as a typological model for the return from exile. Just as Joseph lived in Egypt and was restored to his father, so will the exiles in Babylon continue to live and will be restored to the land of Rachel’s grave. Just as Jacob mourned under a mistaken understanding of Joseph’s absence, so the conjured Rachel mourns under a mistaken interpretation of the exile. Through allusion to Jacob’s mourning for Joseph, therefore, this passage presents an argument for a particular view of the Babylonian conquest. While it is possible, and even legitimate, to experience the exile as a kind of metaphorical death of the people, it is in fact merely a temporary absence.

Competing Metaphors of Exile

Rachel is invoked in this passage, therefore, as the embodiment of an understanding of the exile as an absolute end, a kind of death for the people. What is

20 See McKane, *Jeremiah XXVI-LII*, p. 797; Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, p. 134.

21 Ben-Porat, “Literary Allusion,” p. 108.

at stake in the passage, and what this allusion adjudicates, is precisely what metaphor applies to the exile. As a number of other texts show, the author of Jer. 31:15 has not simply posited the exile-as-death metaphor as a hypothetical possibility. Instead, it draws on a metaphor that other texts attest was a live option for understanding the significance of the exile.

With her weeping, Rachel voices a response to exile that might be characterized as Deuteronomic. This perspective, like that of Deuteronomy, envisions the broken covenant as a true end and exile as the ultimate enactment of this irreparable breach. Notwithstanding several late additions that introduce the idea of a renewed covenant (especially Deut. 30:1-10),²² Deuteronomy considers the breach of the covenant to be a final and irreversible act. Deuteronomy 28 provides a litany of punishments the covenant breakers will face, the final of which is departure to foreign lands and complete loss of identity as a people: they will be scattered, worship other gods, and live in constant terror (28:64-68). Thus the choice of obeying Deuteronomy's covenant is depicted as the choice between life and death (30:19-20), blessing and curse, tenure in the land or exile.

Lamentations, though voicing in several places the hope for deliverance, reflects a similar understanding of the Neo-Babylonian conquest. As a number of scholars have argued, the literary form of much of Lamentations reflects a combination of communal lament with motifs drawn from dirges – that is, poems or songs that respond to the literal death of an individual.²³ The mixed genre of Lamentations can therefore be understood as an implicit assent to the idea that the survivors could experience the Neo-Babylonian conquest as a kind of death for Jerusalem and its cultural institutions. In some passages, the language makes this idea explicit. Lamentations 3:2-6, for example, describes

22 See M. Brettler, "Predestination in Deuteronomy 30:1-10," in L.S. Schearing and S. McKenzie (eds.), *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (JSOTSup, 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), pp. 171-88; N. Mastnjak, *Deuteronomy and the Emergence of Textual Authority in Jeremiah* (FAT 2, 87; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), pp. 203-206.

23 See, for example, Westermann's summary of scholarship on the presence of dirge motifs in Lamentations in C. Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), pp. 1-11. Though arguing against previous scholarship that he saw as overemphasizing the influence of the dirge genre, he nevertheless concludes that "Under the immediate impact of the catastrophe of 587 the collapse of Jerusalem was described in such a way that motifs from the dirge enriched the communal lament. This was because the collapse of the city was experienced as its death" (p. 11). See also T. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 36-37; A.-M. Wetter, "Balancing the Scales: The Construction of the Exile as Countertradition in the Bible," in B. Becking, A. Cannegieter, W. van der Poll, and A.-M. Wetter, *From Babylon to Eternity: The Exile Remembered and Constructed in Text and Tradition* (London: Equinox, 2009), pp. 41-44.

Yahweh as a shepherd who threatens rather than protects the flock, and the flock as suddenly aware of the shepherd's complicity in the slaughter of sheep. The language used equates exile with death through both the imagery of darkness and explicit simile: "he²⁴ made me lie down in darkness like those dead from of old" (3:6). And later, the lamenting voice cries out "from the depths of the pit" (3:53, 55).

Nowhere is this interpretation of the exile more vividly portrayed than in Ezekiel's vision of dry bones. The imagery of death animates this text, which depicts the post-conquest people of Israel as a vast multitude of desiccated human remains. Ezekiel 37:11 interprets the image: "He said to me, human, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they are saying, 'Our bones have dried up. Our hope has perished. We are cut off indeed.'"²⁵ In this interpretation, the bones, who are really the whole house of Israel, paradoxically give voice to their understanding of their fate. Ezekiel's answer to the problem of the exile is not a denial of its death-like nature; his response is instead a vision of the vivifying potency of the prophetic word itself, which transforms the bones back into living flesh. In the symbolic world of the vision, the exile really is the death of the people; the restoration is, therefore, pictured as a resurrection. That the books of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel give voice to the exile-as-death metaphor perhaps suggests the ubiquity and persuasiveness of that metaphor for the Judean survivors. Neither prophetic text can ignore or completely invalidate this perspective; both are at pains to incorporate it into their vision of a future hope.

Lamentations and Ezekiel, therefore, give evidence for a larger exilic discourse that struggled to articulate metaphors that could capture the traumatic experiences of the sixth century BCE. These texts actualize what may well be imagined as a common response; the effect of the Neo-Babylonian conquest could be experienced as nothing less than the death of a people and a culture. Jeremiah's weeping Rachel, therefore, can be understood as a representative of this understanding and experience. In the midst of a larger passage that seeks to interpret the exile as a temporary chastisement of a just but merciful God, Jer. 31:15-17 stops to address this alternative interpretation. While this passage is at pains to correct the exile-as-death metaphor, it does not simply refute or

24 Though we acknowledge the importance of inclusive language in general, the consistent use of masculine language for the deity is a feature of the text that we choose to represent rather than modify in our translations. This choice reflects our understanding of the text and should not be taken as an ascription of normative authority to its gender claims.

25 Walther Zimmerli claims that that the quoted lament of the people in v. 11 temporally precedes the imagery of the Ezekiel's vision; the imagery of the lament generated the more elaborated imagery of the vision that responds to it. See W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 258, 262-63.

contradict it. Instead, it ventriloquizes that perspective through a venerable ancestor and, by allusion to Genesis 37, suggests that the mourning is appropriate even if predicated on a false premise. This response can be contrasted, for example, to the rejection of the sour-grapes proverb that features later in Jer. 31:29-30. There, the alternative perspective is simply denied. Even while providing a new interpretation of the exile, Jer. 31:15-17 acknowledges the possibility of experiencing exile as a rupture as profound and irreversible as death.

In fact, the restoration imagined in vv. 16-17 is construed as "payment" for Rachel's "labor." In the ancient Judean religious imagination, securing divine help requires first getting the deity's attention and, in a sense, moving the deity to pity. This idea is evident, for example, in the exodus tradition that deliverance came from a response to the people's cry of distress (Exod. 3:7-9) as well as in the broader lament tradition.²⁶ Jeremiah 31:16 acknowledges the logic of this dynamic and declares that the mourning has, in fact, successfully caught the attention of the deity and moved him to provide comfort with words of salvation.²⁷ Thus, even while refuting the mistaken premise at the root of Rachel's mourning, the passage acknowledges the ritual effectiveness of the response that she represents.

The problem that the allusion to Genesis 37 solves for Jer. 31:25-17, therefore, is how the exile-as-death perspective can be reconciled with its own view of exile as a temporary phase in the people's history. If exile-as-death perspective is mistaken, according to this passage, it is only to the extent that the ancestor Jacob was also mistaken to mourn inconsolably for Joseph. Within the metaphorical world evoked by the parallel mourning of Rachel, Joseph's departure from Jacob becomes both a precedent and model for imagining the historical experience of exile. This allusion reads the Joseph story as typology, and it is the reader's recognition of this typology that drives the rhetorical point of the Jeremian oracle. Just as Joseph was restored to his father, so will Judah return to the land of Rachel's grave.

Allusion and Trauma

The sixth century Neo-Babylonian conquest, destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, and forced migration represented a full-scale threat to the existence of

26 See C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1965), pp. 259-65, and, more recently, D.A. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 39-45.

27 Thus, mourning corresponds to what Lambert calls "the artistry of distress" (*How Repentance Became Biblical*, pp. 18-20; 34-36). Along with fasting and petitions, mourning makes distress visible and its logic is predicated on getting a response from the observer.

Judean culture. Through its allusion to Genesis 37, Jer. 31:15 employs a strategic response to this cultural trauma. On the one hand, it recognizes the validity of the experience of the trauma as a metaphorical death. Rachel's weeping represents all those who mourn for the death of the people. This mourning is not in vain, but indeed has succeeded in moving the deity to pity. At the same time, however, the allusion seeks to replace the metaphor of exile as death with the metaphor of the exile as a Joseph-like sojourn in a foreign land.

This literary strategy can be understood within the cultural conflict model laid out by scholars of cultural traumas. Cultural revitalization – if it is to occur at all – often includes a process of reclaiming cultural symbols and spiritual traditions.²⁸ It is therefore highly significant that Jer. 31:15-17 responds to a cultural threat specifically through recourse to a tradition about the ancestors. In the context of exile, it could appear that the history of the family of Jacob has come to an end. Jeremiah 31:15-17 asserts not only that this is mistaken, but that the old story of Joseph's return will in fact be recapitulated by the surviving community. The hope for the future is predicated on the contemporary relevance of the community's old ancestor legends. The allusion to the legendary ancestors of Genesis 37 thus argues for the continued validity of the very community identity that the Neo-Babylonian conquest threatens to disrupt. Allusion as a literary strategy, therefore, gains particular traction in the context of a process of cultural revitalization as a response to cultural trauma.

A Modern Example of Cultural Trauma

We have uncovered how Jer. 31:15 deploys a particular literary strategy in response to a tangible threat to cultural survival. Such a reading reflects a philologically and historically informed understanding of the sixth-century BCE text. We propose to bring this reading further. In order to bring into relief the experience of trauma attested to in the text, we propose turning now to a contemporary example of an artistic response to cultural trauma: the *Witness Blanket* and the Canadian aboriginal school system to which it attests.²⁹ The purpose of such a juxtaposition is to stage a mutually illuminating reading of both texts. The point of this exercise is not that either of these texts is necessary for understanding the other, but rather that their deliberate juxtaposition brings out features that might not otherwise emerge. In particular, we want to resist treating Jer. 31:15 as merely an artifact of a bygone era. Reading this

28 Stamm, et al., "Considering a Theory," pp. 99-100.

29 For information on how American boarding schools used violence and even warfare to enforce this and other policies intended to restrict or eliminate American Indians' cultures, see J. Davis, "American Indian Boarding School Experiences: Recent Studies from Native Perspectives," *OAH Magazine of History* 15.2 (Winter, 2001), pp. 20-22.

ancient text alongside the contemporary *Witness Blanket* directs attention both to the recognition of cultural trauma as a persistent cultural experience and to what is at stake in artistic responses to it. It spurs us to not be satisfied with antiquarian interest in an ancient text, but to see it as an opportunity to acknowledge our own cultures as perpetrators of the kind of violence attested in the text. As such, this intertextual reading has the potential to introduce an inescapably ethical component in the reading of Jer. 31:15. The resistance to cultural trauma is not just an unfortunate phenomenon attested in the past; it is a present reality.

The fruitfulness of such an intertext for Jer. 31:15 arises first of all from the structural parallels. Each text is a response to a cultural threat. The power of the *Witness Blanket* as an intertext arises secondly from its historical and cultural proximity. As a contemporary artistic response to trauma, the *Witness Blanket* has the potential both to activate our sympathy for the victims as well as to recognize our own culture's potential complicity. Finally, both texts feature children: the metaphorically lost children of Jer. 31:15 and the all too real victims of the residential school system. Though the tenor of the Rachel's children may indicate exiled Judah as a whole, we may well imagine that part of the aptness of the metaphor lies in the particularly painful loss that the departure of children represented for the survival of a culture. The traumatic events that these two texts respond to are obviously significantly different. Nevertheless, reading Jer. 31:15 with and through the *Witness Blanket* directs our readerly attention to the real lived experience of cultural trauma.

To fully engage the *Witness Blanket* as an intertext for Jer. 31:15 requires an understanding of the brutal history of the Canadian residential school system. The potential discomfort this account may provoke becomes an intertextual lens by which to reread Jer. 31:15.

For six years, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission heard testimonies from 7,000 victims and leaders of residential schools. The final report of this committee states that:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as "cultural genocide."³⁰

³⁰ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, 2015), p. 5; accessible at <www.trc.ca>.

The results of this genocide have been the destruction of political and social institutions, the displacement of people, the seizure of land, the forgetting of languages, the prohibition of spiritual practices, and the separation of children from their parents to prevent the transmission of identity and cultural values from one generation to the next. The Canadian federal government estimates that at least 150,000 First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students attended residential schools between 1820 and 1996. Churches and religious communities participated in the residential school administration.

Colonial and patriarchal ideology are clearly expressed in Canada's first prime minister's speech in 1883. Sir John A. Macdonald said:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he [*sic*] is surrounded by savages, and though he [*sic*] may learn to read and write, his [*sic*] habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He [*sic*] is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.³¹

These measures were part of a coherent policy to eliminate Aboriginal people as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will. The residential school system was based on an assumption that European civilization and Christian religions were superior to Aboriginal culture, which was seen as being savage and brutal.³² This policy's objective was to destroy this culture hence the judgment of this system as the means for a cultural genocide and a paradigmatic example of historical and colonial trauma.³³

³¹ Canada, House of Commons Debates (9 May 1883), pp. 1107-1108.

³² These schools were part of a process that brought European states and Christian churches together in a complex and powerful manner. The history of the schools can be best understood in the context of this relationship between the growth of global, European-based empires and the Christian churches. Starting in the sixteenth century, European states gained control of indigenous peoples' lands throughout the world. It was an era of mass migration. Millions of Europeans arrived as colonial settlers in nearly every part of the world. Millions of Africans were transported in the European-led slave trade, in which coastal Africans collaborated. Traders from India and China spread throughout the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, bringing indentured servants whose lives were little different from those of slaves. See S. Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 21-22.

³³ Historical and colonial trauma can manifest itself by: "(a) communal feelings of familial and social disruption, (b) existential depression based on communal disruption, (c)

The children were forcefully removed from their parents by the federal police officers. As the children arrived at the schools, their clothes were burned, their hair cut off, and even their names were suppressed. They were simply called by a number because their names were too complicated to pronounce. The students were subjected to various kinds of abusive treatment:

For children, life in these schools was lonely and alien. Buildings were poorly located, poorly built, and poorly maintained. The staff was limited in numbers, often poorly trained, and not adequately supervised. Many schools were poorly heated and poorly ventilated, and the diet was meagre and of poor quality. Discipline was harsh, and daily life was highly regimented. Aboriginal languages and cultures were demeaned and suppressed. The educational goals of the schools were limited and confused, and usually reflected a low regard for the intellectual capabilities of Aboriginal people. For the students, education and technical training too often gave way to the drudgery of doing the chores necessary to make the schools self-sustaining. Child neglect was institutionalized, and the lack of supervision created situations where students were prey to sexual and physical abusers.³⁴

Discipline was kept with a mix of humiliation and brutality as these two quotes from the Truth and Reconciliation testimonies show: "They would just start beating you and lose control and hurl you against the wall, throw you on the floor, kick you, punch you."³⁵ "If we wet our beds, we were made to stand in the corner in our pissy clothes, not allowed to change."³⁶

confusion toward owning the ancestral pain accompanied by the temptation to adopt colonial values, (d) chronic existential grief and angst manifested in destructive behaviors, (e) daily re-experiencing of the colonial trauma through racism and stereotyping, and (f) lack of resolution of the existential, communal pain." See Stamm, et al., "Considering a Theory," p. 94 which draws on another work that studies the problem specifically in the context of the indigenous people of North America by adding the fact that this trauma can be ongoing, it does not have to be in the past (see E. Duran et al., "Healing the American Indian soul wound" in Y. Danieli (ed.), *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* [New York: Plenum, 1998], pp. 341-54).

34 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned*, p. 7.

35 Geraldine Bob, Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories (23 November 2011), Statement Number: 2011-2685, cited in The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report* (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, 2015), p. 103; accessible at <www.trc.ca>.

36 Wendy Lafond, Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Batoche, Saskatchewan (24 July 2010), Statement Number: 01-SK-18-25JY10-015, cited in The

Several statements testify to sexual abuse in residential schools. Indian Affairs and churches placed their own interests ahead of the children by covering up sexual abuse cases throughout the entire history of the residential school system: "In some cases, staff members were not fired, even after being convicted of assaulting a student."³⁷ These patterns persisted into the late twentieth century. The full extent of the abuse that occurred in the schools is only now coming to light. As of January 31, 2015, the Independent Assessment Process, established under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement had received 37,951 claims for injuries resulting from physical and sexual abuse at residential schools. By the end of 2014, 30,939 of those claims were resolved with the awarding of \$2,690,000,000.00 in compensation.³⁸ The sheer numbers show that child abuse was widespread.

A Hidden Infanticide

The motto "kill the Indian, save the child" captures the objective of the system. But according to popular singer Florant Volant, who spent his youth in a residential school, "They often killed the child as well."³⁹

Until the 1950s, the mortality rate of residential school children was four to five times higher than that of children of the same age.⁴⁰ In nearly 50% of cases, the cause of death is not specified. More than 4,100 children died in these institutions. More than one in 50 residents did not survive. Nearly one-third (32%) of students who died in residential schools were not identified by name. In the case of 747 deaths, the sex of the child is not even known. The cause of death was not elucidated in half of the cases. Generally, it is the school that determined the place and nature of the burial. Throughout the history of this system, children who died in school were buried in the cemetery and their graves were often barely marked. This brings to mind the anonymity of the children that are no more recalled in Jer. 31:15.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, p. 104.

37 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, pp. 105-106.

38 Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat, Adjudication Secretariat Statistics, from September 19, 2007 to January 31, 2015; accessible at <<http://iap-pej.ca/information/stats-eng.php>>.

39 F. Lévesque, *Le Soleil* (June 3, 2015); accessible at <<http://www.lapresse.ca/le-soleil/actualites/societe/201506/02/01-4874744-pensionnats-indiens-souvent-ils-ont-tue-lenfant-aussi-dit-florent-vollant.php>>. English translation is ours.

40 For more details on health problems, death rates, and burial sites, see The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned*, pp. 60-71.

The end of the residential school system is not the end of the story.⁴¹ Consequences still persist today. They are reflected in the wide disparities in education, income, and health between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians which condemn large numbers of Aboriginal people to shorter, poorer, and more troubled lives. The care of Aboriginal children by child welfare agencies and the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal people are all part of the aftermath associated with how Aboriginal children were treated in Indian Residential Schools.⁴²

The experience described by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as cultural genocide reflects all too vividly how scholars describe cultural trauma:

Cultural trauma involves more than physical destruction of people, property, and landscapes such as might be seen in warfare or ethnic cleansing. It directly or indirectly attacks what constitutes culture, of which there are some essential yet vulnerable elements: body/space practices, religion, histories, language, state organizations, and economics The attacks may include the prohibition of language, spiritual healing practices, or access to public spaces. There may be the creation of a "new" history or a "new" enemy. There may be rape or interpersonal violence to destroy families, the elimination of traditional authority figures within a community, or elevation of an authority or outside agency to bypass the traditional systems of authority.⁴³

Art as Response to Cultural Trauma

Kai Erikson describes collective trauma as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community."⁴⁴ Art is one of the mechanisms that can facilitate survival, recovery, and resilience from the collective trauma experienced by Native Canadians.

41 Studies of American Indian and Canadian First Nation parents of 10- to 12-year-old children show that historical losses were often in their thoughts and feelings even if they were at least one generation removed from the boarding school era. See L.B. Whitbeck, G.W. Adams, D.R. Hoyt, and X. Chen, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Historical Trauma Among American Indian People," *American Journal Community Psychology* 33 (2004), pp. 119-30.

42 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned*, p. 103.

43 Stamm, et al., "Considering a Theory," p. 95.

44 K. Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in C. Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 187.

Inspired by the idea of a woven blanket of several pieces, Carey Newman (Ha-yalth-kingeme) – a sculptor of Kwagiulth, Salish, and British origins – created a 12-meter-long art installation composed of 887 objects recovered from residential schools called *Witness Blanket*.⁴⁵

The center of this artwork is a school door surrounded by two large walls where artifacts from native culture such as a lock of braided hair or moccasins are placed together with objects signifying the cultural assimilation aimed by the residential schools such as skates or a statue of Mary. These objects and texts are signs that speak. At the top of the door, we see the words “Sunday Mass” striped in red and a large child’s face separated in two. The color of this face is white on the right side and darker on the left side. It represents the forced assimilation of children. *Witness Blanket* has been exhibited in several communities through a pan-Canadian tour to commemorate the atrocities of the residential school and to help bring about ongoing reconciliation.

Our reading of Jer. 31:15’s use of literary allusion directs our attention to the use of cultural symbols in the *Witness Blanket*. In both cases, the use of cultural symbols can be seen as an act of defiance against the cultural threat. This shared strategy asserts the persistence of the culture and its symbols in defiance of the forces that threaten its existence.

The name *Witness Blanket* evokes a cover designed to comfort and protect. The website of the work indicates that “for many of us, blankets identify who we are and where we are from. We wear them during ceremonies and we offer them as gifts. The blankets protect our young people and give comfort to our elders.” This artwork, through the objects it exhibits, is an evocation of the history of residential schools. It pays tribute to the children who have lived there.

The shared sense of collective suffering motivated the creation of this symbolic representation. It is a way of building what Jeffery Alexander calls “trauma narrative.”⁴⁶ Constructing a trauma narrative is an act of meaning-making to transform the collective identity of those who suffered. C. Frechette and E. Boas summarize trauma narratives in this way:

Broadly speaking, a trauma narrative has two aims, each involving a paradox: to recount honestly the full experience of the trauma, including what happened and the feelings associated with the experience, even though the memories and feelings may be accessible only in fragments; and to interpret the trauma in ways that confront and replace harmful assumptions and beliefs prompted by the experience. Such interpretations

45 Images of this artwork are accessible at <<http://witnessblanket.ca/>>.

46 J.C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

have the task of supporting a sense of order, identity, agency, well-being, and solidarity, while also expressing the impossibility of fully comprehending the trauma.⁴⁷

This duality of aims animates the *Witness Blanket* as an artistic response to cultural trauma. On the one hand, it recognizes the reality of the experience of the trauma lived by Canadian natives by showing artifacts of these boarding schools. This artwork helps those who see it to remember, to weep, and to mourn. But at the same time, it seeks to participate in the ongoing reconciliation process. The countless broken or damaged objects from Indian residential schools are like paragraphs of a narrative that seemed doomed to oblivion. "Woven" together, these artifacts are the words of a silent testimony that tells future generations a story of loss, strength, reconciliation, and pride. Thus, it constructs a coherent trauma narrative. The dual movement of the *Witness Blanket* recalls the apparent paradoxical nature of Jer. 31:15, which sought simultaneously to affirm and to replace an interpretation of the exile as death.

The Potencies of the Text

Reading Jer. 31:15 alongside the *Witness Blanket* both refreshes and destabilizes our engagement with the ancient text. Our initial literary analysis identified in Jer. 31:15 a metaphorical mother weeping for her metaphorical children and argued that this metaphor strategically alludes to Genesis 37. Leaving the analysis in the realm of metaphor alone, however, threatens to obscure the very non-metaphorical realities that stand behind the text: real parents weeping for real children and the experience of cultural trauma as a kind of death. Reading Jer. 31:15 alongside the *Witness Blanket* directs attention to these concrete realities.

This intertextual reading has alerted us to parallel artistic strategies deployed by cultures under attack. The use of cultural symbols amounts to a protest against the external forces that would threaten a culture's existence. The visual art of the *Witness Blanket* provides a potent rejection of the dominant white culture's rejection of Aboriginal culture. Similarly, the allusion to Genesis 37 is not merely a literary flourish, but a defiant act of cultural revitalization that refuses to acknowledge that the story of Rachel has come to an end. In

47 C. Frechette and E. Boase, "Defining 'Trauma' as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation," in E. Boase and C. Frechette (eds.), *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), p. 6.

both cases, the use of cultural symbols is readable as deeply political and oriented towards nothing less than cultural survival.

This intertextual reading also brings a potentially ethical dimension. 2,500 years of intervening time may make it all too easy to pass over the traumatic experience represented by Rachel's tears. The proximate traumas of the *Witness Blanket* reorient our reading of Jer. 31:15, both permitting us to imagine the realities of the cultural trauma expressed in that text and to confront the responsibility to act and to resist forms of injustice in our own contexts. This intertextual reading propels us away from an ethically complacent reading and towards a reading with the potential to make ethical demands. The *Witness Blanket* asks: "What happened to these children?" and "Wherein lies their future?" Jeremiah 31:15 can likewise now raise these questions. What about the children who are dying today? How do we respond to Syrian refugees? Have we forgotten the image of Aylan Kurdi? In a world that prefers to silence the plight of Aboriginals, children, and displaced peoples, Jeremiah's poem and *Witness Blanket* provide space for the necessary work of memory, reconciliation, and political action.

It is perhaps no surprise that Jer. 31:15 has been so generative of rereadings throughout history. The Gospel of Matthew (2:16-18) quotes it in the narrative of Herod's massacre of the children of Bethlehem. In this text, the image of Rachel crying is utilized as an affective response to the murder of innocent children.⁴⁸ Her voice fills the silence of mothers whose children have just been killed. In the face of violence and oppression, her refusal to be comforted calls readers to resist other forms of injustice. Even in contemporary contexts, the victims of traumas continue to appropriate this text to give voice to their grief.⁴⁹ A reading of Jer. 31:15 alongside *Witness Blanket* shows how intertextuality can thus open up biblical exegesis to a reflection upon cultural and ethical

48 For a study of how wailing women in Matthew's Gospel serves as a powerful symbol of survival for people who are coming to terms with the effects of trauma that had broken in their lives, see J. Claasen, "The Image of the Wailing Woman and the Task of the Feminist Theologian: With Special Attention to the Role of Lament in the Book of Matthew," in M. Pillay, S. Nadar and C. Le Bruyns (eds.), *Ragbag Theologies: Essays in Honour of Denise Ackermann, A Feminist Theologian of Praxis* (Stellenbosch: Sun, 2009), pp. 193-204.

49 For example, many articles have used the Rachel weeping metaphor to comment mass shootings in US schools such as Columbine or Sandy Hook, see, for instance, Mike Lux, "Rachel's Lament," accessible at <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mike-lux/rachels-lament_b_2315429.html>; Lorenzo Alpacete, "Sandy Hook/Slaughter of Innocents," accessible at <<http://www.ilsussidiario.net/News/English-Spoken-Here/Culture-Religion-Science/2012/12/19/SANDY-HOOK-Slaughter-of-Innocents/348597/>>; and Barry H. Corey, "O Little Town of Newtown," accessible at <<http://offices1.biola.edu/president/communications/2012/dec/20/o-little-town-newtown/>>.

matters by “studying the text as an intertextuality within society and history, today’s and yesterday’s.”⁵⁰

In practice, biblical studies places reader-centered and author-centered approaches in fundamental opposition. Our reading of Jeremiah 31 alongside the *Witness Blanket*, however, demonstrates the fruitfulness of transgressing these disciplinary boundaries. In our reading, we have sought to bring out the multi-layered significance of Jer. 31:15 by juxtaposing it to the *Witness Blanket*. What the *Witness Blanket* accomplishes in a visual medium for threatened Canadian native cultures, Jer. 31:15 accomplishes textually for a sixth-century BCE Judean audience. Attention to the dynamics of allusion in Jeremiah 31 directs attention to the strategic use of tradition. Reading this strategy in relation to contemporary art casts the reading of Jeremiah 31 in a newly ethical light. Both texts stage a protest against the threat to the continued existence of a culture by asserting the persistent potency of its cultural symbols. At stake in these texts is nothing less than cultures fighting for survival.

50 G. Aichele and G.A. Phillips, “Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis,” *Semeia* 69-70 (1995), pp. 7-18 (11).