

ABSTRACT

## Reclaiming the golden calf: Ritual design as creative genre

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This presentation summarises how I am progressing an experimental genre of creative writing – ritual design. My project draws upon a surprisingly strong reaction I had to reading the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. I am creatively engaging and changing this story. In the traditional version, while Moses receives stone tablets with God’s commandments, the Israelites, encamped at the base of Mount Sinai, celebrate around a golden calf. God is furious and plans to destroy the entire community, but Moses intercedes. Moses then passes along God’s order to the priestly tribe, the Levites: Take your swords and kill your family and neighbours who celebrated around the calf. The Levites obey and massacre about three thousand people. My project deconstructs and re-envisioning this myth, as I believe this is one of the worst stories ever told, a story about slaughtering family and neighbours for heterodox expressions of religiosity. My thesis creatively engages three frameworks – amythia, death anxiety and ritual – while pursuing this driving question: How might re-envisioning the golden calf story be conceived and designed as (1) a ritualised symbolic immortality project that (2) redresses amythia and (3) regulates death anxiety? Considered together, amythia and death anxiety may foster anxiety and related psychosocial challenges, while creative symbolic immortality projects and ritualisation may mitigate these challenges. Speculatively, re-envisioning myth engages these regulatory factors; rituals of creation and rituals of engagement may help to regulate death anxiety, while the re-envisioning effort may serve as a symbolic immortality project. My methodology applies ritual design as a genre of creative writing that encourages readers to reconsider and personalise their own received mythologies and rituals. The creative component of my thesis portrays a community of priests who are changing the golden calf story and leveraging the above frameworks to inform their religious practice.