Poetry and Grace: An Autoethnography which Explores Writing Poetry as Prayer in the Context of Ignatian Spirituality

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River Notes

On a winter’s day, I read her travel story, 
and shiver at the first full stop.

Outside, the old elm is nude, 
its trunk in gnarly need of exfoliation. 
The grey-day wind crazies my neighbour’s hair. 
and her immortal Hill’s hoist spins in wizard’s fury. 
I set a girl-guide fire and light it, 
sit down to read more of the travel piece:

She is wearing gloves and beanie, 
a coat and collar all the way up to her watery eyes 
which blur all she loves about the river. 
She blinks to clear the cherished memories. 
Herons and pelicans in the glistening sun 
do what they do.

There is a peace with her that doesn't care 
where reflection and imagination merge. 
The river in her flows around rocks and debris, 
confronts the unfortunate accidental car 
and the degradation of plastic humanity.

She describes the river, 
but I see an emerald gown 
a rich bridal train shimmering through leadlight 
along the longest aisle. The river is 
unselfconscious, regressing and pressing on.

The travel writer sits in the playful dirt, 
mourning simplicity and listening 
to the wise old river speak baby talk; 
experimental syllables which babble 
into the longing at her depths.

My note-taking stops. 
The elm is suddenly ageless, 
and even poetry is lost 
to the mystery of abundance.
Abstract

Through poetic autoethnography, I explore the process and the product of writing poetry in the context of Ignatian spirituality. While poetry is crafted, concentrated and poignant word-pictures, it can also be prayer; an encounter with God.

Increasingly since praying the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in 2004, and further becoming a spiritual director in the Ignatian tradition, I have written poetry which is diverse in form, content and purpose. The present poetic autoethnography inspired creative processes in which poetry was prayer and a tool for growing self-awareness.

In this thesis, I have explored and discovered poetry writing as reflection, conversation, a means of gratefulness for God’s goodness in all things, a prayerful personal examen at the end of the day, a tool for discernment of spirits, a way of self-supervision especially after an experience of giving spiritual direction, a vocation and a joyful gift.

During the Four Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises, the exercitant asks God for specific graces through which relationship with God and efficacy in apostolic endeavor are strengthened. Poetry writing enhanced for me the experience of imaginative contemplation so that these graces continued to unfold and deepen. Poetry is an exercise in which intellect meets intuition in a heart-felt experience of knowing, which in Spanish is sentir. In both process and product, the present work has underlined the significance of the methodology to the appropriation of grace in me.

In spiritual direction, both director and directee engage in a poetic and intimate listening which opens expansive possibilities of growing in knowledge of God and love for God, and in personal freedom. This listening increasingly draws a person to respond in loving action directed towards others. Writing poetry, praying and doing autoethnography are steps into liminality which require a disposition of trust. My trust is in the unknowable mysterious God experienced as present in all things.

The thesis begins with the Abstract poem, *Home at the edge.*
Home at the edge

Poetry is crafted, concentrated, poignant word-pictures.  
It is prayer, 
an encounter with God.

Poetry discovers, entertains.  
A good conversation.  
It chats over a coffee 
appreciating goodness.

It is an Examen at the end of the day, 
discernment and a way forward.  
It self-supervises.

It is an invitation to be 
at home on the edge; 
a liminal joyful gift.
Acknowledgements

At the end of 2007, a year after Dr. Michael Smith SJ offered the suggestion, I began to research the present doctoral thesis. Michael, I am grateful for your encouragement and passion in education and formation, and your insight to my heart. Thank you for your attention to detail and for assistance in bringing about a cohesive work.

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In my formation, I am grateful to my spiritual directors, mentors, supervisors, colleagues, peers in formation and friends whose love and encouragement have been inspirational. You have offered safe spaces where I have found vulnerability to be a trusted gift. Thank you to my examiners, Dr William Barry sj and Dr Maureen Conroy rsm. Your thorough reading honoured this work and esteemed it more than I could have imagined.

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It would be wonderful if I could specifically thank my directees, supervisees and students with whom I share sacred spaces. My personal formation and poetry writing cannot be separated from the generosity of your sharing. You have believed in God enough to make yourselves vulnerable to me. Thank you for your inspirational faith.

My husband David has unfailingly believed in me for over 40 years. Thank you David for freeing up my time and poetic space to enable this work and for your careful reading of it. Poetry is not enough to express my gratitude to you. Thank you to Ben, Rachelle and Jon and to other relatives for your interest and patience.

I am grateful to various poets and editors who have enjoyed my writing enough to publish it, and others who have used my writing as prayer in workshops, retreats and spiritual direction. Thank you to Adrian Akkermann at Incubator Recording and Mastering for your competent work and easy presence.

There are inspirational people I meet everywhere who will never know the effect they have had on me. I hope that all who read this work think it is about them. The thesis has done its work if you are mirrored in the pages, challenged and consoled by the work.

More than anyone, I am grateful to the ever-present God communicating and acting in concrete and poetic ways which enable me to minister in the way I do. May God be loved and praised.
Author’s Declaration of Originality

This thesis is my original work. Any material additional to my original work is attributed to the appropriate author(s) or artist(s) in the footnotes and bibliography. I have not submitted or had accepted this work in part or whole for assessment at any educational or academic institution with the purposes of gaining a diploma or degree award.

I consent to this document being made available for loan and photocopying when deposited in the university library, subject to the usual copyright provisions.

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Marlene Marburg Date
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Introduction

I began to notice beauty skywards

Beginnings

The present work began with wondering why my poetry had become more inspired and energized through the experience of praying the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.¹ As I believe that all creative and expansive outcomes are rooted in God, I began to ponder the nature of the relationship between poetry and prayer. Further I began to wonder if writing poetry is prayer. As I progressed through the work of this thesis, it became apparent that poetry was not only prayer understood as an encounter with God but was a tool that took me to liminal awareness, challenging me to risk confronting whatever unknowns it held for me. In a real way, writing poetry asked me to be ‘indifferent’ in the Ignatian sense: to stand at balance before all possibilities, and at the same time say ‘yes’ to God in terms of growing awareness. I risked change in terms of faith, theology, Christology, axiology, epistemology, and the quality and nature of important relationships. I risked loss for the hope of what I could not imagine.

The Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises [23] asks a person to make decisions based on the criterion of what will bring glory to God. Simply defined, ‘what brings glory to God’ is for me to become alive to my most authentic way of being and acting. My deep desire is that this poetic autoethnography brings glory to God as I say ‘yes’ to growth in personal authenticity, hence towards integration.

Each chapter in this thesis explores at least one of the risks mentioned above. For example, as a woman speaking to and from the margins in Chapter Seven, I risk

¹ As a basis to the present work, I use the Literal Translation of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, otherwise known as the Autograph by Father Elder Mullan SJ, which is found in David L Fleming, Draw Me Into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises, A Literal Translation and A Contemporary Reading (Saint Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996). Annotations [1-22] and Notations [23 – ] are the numerated paragraphs in the text of The Spiritual Exercises designated in this work by a number in square brackets. The Spiritual Exercises in italics is a reference to the actual text. ‘Spiritual Exercises’ refers to the actual prayer Exercises, and ‘spiritual exercises’ refers to any spiritual exercises. No inverted commas will enclose these terms in the present thesis. In Annotation 19 [19], we find the instructions regarding the Retreat in daily life, which is the Retreat I prayed in 2004.
disturbing the status quo in terms of the theology of my religious heritage, Roman Catholicism.

The thesis

God's thesis

God's thesis mysteriously written in the cosmos
does not argue is not partisan is not apologetic
God's thesis is an invitation to enter where the clouds part
to ponder, to celebrate, to participate in eternal unknowing

Imaging God as one who invites, I intend to follow an invitational model, especially as ‘invitation’ is integral to the relationship between poet and reader and between spiritual director and directee in spiritual direction. According to spiritual director Susan Philips:

When we meet with a spiritual director or spiritual friend, we learn about ourselves in the presence of a person who communicates God’s infinite interest in us.2

I learn about myself in the context of spiritual direction and in the reflective process of journaling in prayer. Much of that journaling is in poetry. I propose that writing specific kinds of poetry is not only an encounter with God in prayer but an effective tool which God as Mystery uses to draw a person forward in personal authenticity and wholeness.

It was in the context of the Exercises that my poetry gained prominence in my life. In this thesis I show that writing poetry mobilizes the graces of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. Poetry writing therefore is more than finding poignant and distilled words to express an idea or experience. While words are utilized to be the best possible expression of an experience, poetry is sufficiently ambiguous to be spacious and meaningful to many people. Writing poetry is for me about the ongoing journey into freedom, of finding voice through the experience, and being connected exponentially with deeper levels of personal meaning.

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This thesis contributes an original and creative body of thought which values poetry as prayer and describes and invites ways in which poetry can be used in spiritual direction, giving the Spiritual Exercises and supervision. It also offers a woman’s approach amongst the largely male approaches to the Exercises. This aspect is important because Ignatius’ legacy of the Exercises was to both men and women.

By way of summary, this thesis shows how

- Writing poetry is my personal vocation and can inspire a person to reflect on his or her personal vocation
- Writing poetry is a spiritual exercise
- Writing and exploring poetry are appropriate and helpful for spiritual direction
- Writing poetry opens a person to the graces of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius
- Writing poetry mobilizes the graces of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius
- Poetry invites readers to hear the sound of their own voices
- Poetry invites a reader into the reader’s own spiritual experience
- The poet and reader engage an experience of inter-subjectivity
- Poetry is self-revelatory for both the poet and the reader
- Writing poetry is a tool of growing self-awareness and self-growth.

Freedom

a. Finding voice

My mother, an actor and elocution teacher, listened to me and more astutely, listened to my diction. I can’t remember exactly what I used to say in the poetry I simultaneously invented and spoke to her, but I know that I saw, in my mind’s eye, expansive fields of long, yellow grass. It was Australian poetry with the flavor of Dorothea MacKellar and a touch of ‘English meadow’. I recall the embarrassment I experienced the last time I spoke this naïve poetry to my mother. I secretly vowed I would never perform impromptu poetry for her again.
I lost a chord from my heart
I lost a chord from my heart
along with my voice
I began to notice beauty
skywards
the white height of dead trees

Finding my voice is figurative and literal. Poetry is to be heard as much as read. To that end, I include audio compact discs of recorded poetry in my own voice. (See also Appendix One regarding the impact of sound on the hearer’s affect). It has been a long journey to accept that I will always speak in ways my mother would have tried to improve. Throughout this autoethnography, the methodology of this thesis, I will speak in ways that some people ‘will try to improve’. To focus on my diction and even on the quality of my poetry is to miss the point. I am writing about relationship with a loving God and the way I have come to know God. God does not require perfect diction. God is satisfied with a poem in progress. The quality of the poetry is not always an indication of its power.

Poetic language and poetry as an epistemological tool asks more of the reader than many works do, because, alongside information to digest, I also offer an invitation to enter a liminal experience and reflect on it. I do not intend to argue points to the reader or to tell him or her what is appropriate to believe; I use autoethnography to present and explore a narrative in which a reader will find consonance or dissonance with which he or she may grapple. This is the distinct contribution of autoethnographic epistemologies. I anticipate that various levels of engagement with the work will reward variously.

When I speak about ‘finding my voice’, I am referring to growth in personal authenticity, the ongoing experience Carl Jung named as individuation which briefly means ‘bringing into reality the whole human being’. I resonate with the experience underpinning Murray Stein’s analysis in Individuation: Inner Work:

---

The work of individuation proceeds in two movements, an analytic and synthetic one. These are not sequential … but rather take place in a rhythm specific to each individuation process. The analytic movement results in separation and differentiation; the synthetic movement builds up the transcendent function. Out of this process emerges an identity based on conscious and unconscious, personal and cultural (as well as archetypal) images and contents. … The individuation process is lifelong.

Poetry

Light

splintered across the river
accompanies me to the heads
of an alluring, unfathomable ocean.
When the turbulence deepens,
air trapped in muddy spaces,
loosens, becomes free,
bounces to the top,
in a communion
of bubbles
in froth.

Ignatian spirituality

In 2004, I prayed the retreat in daily life known as the full Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola [19]. The retreat was instrumental in an ongoing personally integrative and graced process inextricable from writing poetry. My poetry came to life as I prayed, and my prayer came to life as I wrote poetry. Grace, as God’s ongoing human and makes a human being individual – a unique, indivisible unit or “whole man”. Stephen Parker (article selection and commentary) on APRIL 30, 2011 jungcurrents.com/twelve-quotations-on-individuation/ Parker quotes Eranos Meeting at Ascona, Switzerland 2003 as his source of Jung’s original words. Accessed the link http://www.scribd.com/doc/2547949/Jung-Individuation from Parker’s site on 25 November 2012 where the lecture text is included. A helpful text about individuation is Peter O’Connor "Self and the Individuation Process." In Understanding Jung, Understanding Yourself, 88-99. (London: Methuen, 1985).

presence, empowered my life with diverse gifts such as love and joy, sorrow and
disappointment, all of which invite me to be more of who I am created to be.⁵

The encounter with God as I wrote poetry was a spiritual exercise.⁶ It was all the prayer
of the Spiritual Exercises: Ignatian imaginative contemplation, the prayer of
consideration, the application of the senses and apostolic endeavour. It was a tool of
discernment, a liminal experience, a surrender to my personal vocation. Poetry was an
expression of the principle and foundation of my life in God.⁷ It was an encounter with
Christ.

The methodology

Ignatius of Loyola developed Spiritual Exercises and gave them to others before
receiving his theological education. His experience and observations of the dynamic
cycle of life were his major resource for writing the book of the Spiritual Exercises,
which is the ‘gospel’ outcome of his life.⁸ In the same way, my life experiences are the
resource for writing this thesis and the Spiritual Exercises have contributed to my life
experiences by opening me to prayer in a way compatible with my vocation as a poet.
Ignatius empowered me by giving me permission to use my imagination in prayer. He
has also provided an interpretive framework through which I can understand and
express the various stages in the dynamic cycle of life.

In this work, I enter and speak about the culture and spirit of Ignatian spirituality more
than I address the specifically Ignatian Exercises. I engage more with the Exercises
from sacred scripture that Ignatius suggests, rather than his non-scriptural Exercises. I
do this because I have found that scripture, particularly the gospel stories, lend
themselves to imaginative prayer and poetry.

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⁵ Grace is fundamental to the prayer of the Spiritual Exercises. Grace means many things. In the context
of the prayer of the Exercises, it is a spiritual gift received from God. Grace could be identified as
personal attributes, such as intelligence or insight. Grace could be values, such as mutuality, or virtues
such as patience. In many instances throughout this work, I identify grace with the gift of God which I
cannot claim as my own effort. Grace is also referred to as a love ‘relationship’ with God.
⁶ See footnote 1. Poetry is a spiritual exercise (lower case).
⁷ The Principle and Foundation (upper case) of the Spiritual Exercises is found in Notation 23 [23]. I
have on a number of occasions written a personal principle and foundation.
⁸ I am referring to ‘gospel’ in this instance as written foundational faith statements.
I contribute a woman’s interpretation of the spirit of the Exercises for women and men. My thesis necessarily begins with my experience and observations in order to explore the way in which my life might be generative. My reflection on the early years of speaking poetry to my mother makes obvious my emerging self as a poet. I understand it now as God at work in me early in my life.

At nine

When I was small,

wonder-joy was given.

I lay warm in my bed,

feeling my heart beat

looking at myself from the ceiling

expanding the world I knew,

musing the mystery of becoming one

amidst millions of permutations.

I am no-one else.

My experience and observations in this thesis are presented in autoethnography. Carolyn Ellis says:

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).  

Autoethnography is a window to my experience but it opens the window to the reader’s experience.

The relevant methodology for this thesis is poetic autoethnography. The opening poem River Notes was not intentionally written to speak to the relationship of poetry and my life, and yet I have found that it does. The poem offers a way of understanding poetic

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10 At this point, I speak of ‘God’ as a word-symbol, pointing to the relational, centring, indefinable, infinite and ultimate meaning within my personal life and all of life. My extended theology will be addressed directly in the methodology chapter, and underpins the whole thesis.
autoethnography. The face in the space formed by the poem’s left margins looks into the river. The face is involved in the experience of the poem and is an observer of it. The contours of the face dictate the contours of the river, and the face interprets and expresses the experience inter-subjectively. All characters in the poem, including the character of the face, observe and participate in the poem’s physical structure and have some identity in me, the poet.

*River Notes* (after the title page) emphasizes that the shape of the poem contributes to the meaning of the poem as much as the shape of the river contributes to the meaning of a river.\(^\text{11}\) Poetry is a buoyant and flowing element in the river of my life. I had not expected that poetry would accompany me between turbulence and serenity. I did not anticipate the extent to which poetry and the prayer of the Exercises would become content and means of my personal formation. I did not expect that my private poetry would become public ministry.

**The relationship between poetry and prayer**

Ignatius asks me to reflect on life and to find God’s presence in all things. In poetry, I seek to do these things.

I believe all poetry is poetic but not all that is poetic is poetry. Poetry uses the devices of form, shape and space as well as poetic language. Poetic language is symbolic or figurative and points to ideas transcending literal meaning.

Similarly, prayer is poetic, but what is poetic is not always prayerful. The poetry in this thesis is prayer in that it seeks greater understanding of life and deepening communion with God. It has utilised the various Ignatian ways of praying which will be addressed throughout the work. It has spoken to or from the graces specific to the Exercises. Even raw, unedited poetry can take me into a deeper communion with God.

Poetry as in *Awake* speaks the experience of communion and union with God.

\(^{11}\) Poetry in this thesis is my own work unless otherwise stated. Previously published poetry will be footnoted.
Awake

Poetry does not hack nor pry.

It enters with deftness;

a surgeon’s sweet

blade, gently

opening a

beating

heart

During the prayer of the Full Spiritual Exercises, poetry became delightful and satisfying. I resonated with Housden in *Ten Poems to Open Your Heart*, when he said:

> When the heart opens, we forget ourselves and the world pours in.  
> ... When the heart opens, everything matters, and this world and the next become one and the same. ... Many are the sentinels that guard that door: our fears, our self-importance, our meanness, our greed, our bitterness, and others. Yet one good poem can slip past them all.12

The graces

The present work explores the contribution of my poetry to the reception of the graces Ignatius desires for all. Once prayed, the Spiritual Exercises continue their graced efficacy throughout life. In becoming a spiritual director and working with the content of my feelings and thoughts in poetry after a direction session, it became evident that pondering my own poetry allowed increasing self-awareness which in turn helped me be more free to minister in spiritual direction. The process of ‘mining’ poetry is described in *Process poetry*.

Process poetry

I do not defend poetry

It writes its own treasure

unearthed from ruins

personal cities and monuments

raw life squinting in the light

---

remnants and fossils
desiccated stories thirsting
inviting more13

Like an archaeologist
I sweep possibilities
find mystery deep in the dig
I wonder and ponder its meaning

These ancient forms brushed
with refined reliable hair
are brought to light
Priceless

I cannot necessarily extrapolate from this poetic autoethnography, a comprehensive way of understanding the culture of Ignatian spirituality, but it is my hope that spiritual directors and others interested in their journey with God will engage with this research and find their own captivating and generative place. Further, it would be a grace if spiritual directors and those working and studying in formation programs for spiritual directors recognized in a holistic way that writing poetry is a liminal experience which has the capacity to bring a person to greater self-awareness and authentic and life-giving decision-making.

The Spiritual Exercises

a. Ignatius’ Legacy

Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s small collection of structured prayer exercises in 370 Annotations and Notations known as The Spiritual Exercises was central to his legacy. It was the outcome of a systematic analysis of his self-reflective research. The Spiritual Exercises contains written guidance; a tool to nurture a person’s relationship with

13 The ‘more’ or magis (latin) is derived from a concept of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). Magis speaks to the abundance of life in all things, and how a person is always invited to participate in more of that abundance. According to Steinke, Johannes. "The Magis in the Spirituality of St Ignatius.” http://magis1.ignatian.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/1_magis_Steinke_Specker.pdf, Magis, (latin for more) is not about doing more, but about ‘living more with God’. It is about an intimate relationship with God, so that God’s desires are more easily discerned and lived.
God. Ignatius’ faithfulness and vision in the service of God and Jesus Christ, his companion and Lord, also inspired him to co-founded the companions of Jesus, later identified as the Society of Jesus, a male religious order which continues to this day.

My experience of praying the Spiritual Exercises has depended on Ignatius’ legacy. The wisdom and grace I receive from the Exercises depend on my engagement with God through my life experience. Some of the fruit of this engagement is written in the present work.

b. Structure and Prayer

The commitment to the full Spiritual Exercises according to the nineteenth Annotation (denoted hereafter as [19]) was to 30 weeks of one hour’s prayer each day on the given Exercises. For another hour once a week, I shared the content, thoughts and feelings of my prayer with my spiritual director who was trained to give the Exercises. The totality of this experience is named the Retreat in Daily Life [19], and it is one of two ways that Ignatius suggests to pray the full Spiritual Exercises; the second way is as a silent enclosed 30-day retreat [20]. I am respectful and grateful to Ignatius for this significant experience, and I value greatly the participatory commitment which I, as ‘receiver’ of the Exercises, and my spiritual director, as ‘giver’ of the Exercises, shared. This prayer journey was transformative in energizing and directing my desires, talents and skills towards God, love and life.

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15 Refer to Tylenda. A Pilgrim’s Journey, the autobiography of Ignatius as given to fellow Jesuit, Luis Gonzales de Camara in the year 1553. The autobiography begins with the siege at Pamplona where Ignatius was wounded. His subsequent convalescence led him to reflect on the life of Christ and the saints. He finished dictating his autobiography within months of his death, 31 July 1556.

16 Fleming. Draw Me Into Your Friendship. In [19], we find the instructions regarding the Retreat in Daily Life, which is the retreat to which I mostly refer in the present work.

17 Commentators on the Spiritual Exercises refer to ‘retreatant’ as ‘exercitant’, ‘directee’ or in some cases, ‘pilgrim’. The ‘giver’ might be referred to as ‘guide’, ‘director’, ‘spiritual director’ or ‘spiritual companion’. The Retreat is not a strict ‘religious retreat’ where a person abandons his or her normal daily life for a time in order to engage in specific practices of prayer or meditation. The Nineteenth Annotation Retreat is in daily life.

18 The 30-day Retreat or [20] is often referred to as the ‘long retreat’. Ignatius described the 30-day Retreat in Annotation Four [4].
There were two major, immediate and concrete outcomes of this experience: firstly, I found the freedom to embrace formative training to become a ‘giver’ of the Exercises, and secondly, I began to notice that my poetry became more engaging and expansive.

c. Principle and Foundation

Ignatius’ Principle and Foundation in [23] has become a foundational expression of the orientation of my whole life. This autoethnography therefore cannot be confined to 2004. I paraphrase Ignatius’ Principle and Foundation as:

We are created to praise, reverence, and serve God and through this find hope. All things on the face of the earth are created for us to help the purposes of human life as created by the Creator. From this it follows that any person must use these things for advancing human life, and reject them if they hinder what is life-giving.

In order to do this, it is necessary to become indifferent to all that is available to choose by virtue of our free will; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, long rather than short life, and so forth; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.19

I précis the latter paragraph to: ‘I want neither one thing nor another except that it leads to praise of God.’ The obvious problem is that I do not necessarily know what will lead to praise of God, and I can be sure that any image of God is only partial and dim. Having acknowledged that, I am immediately drawn to the image of God as Love, and the image of persons trying to enact what we think is love for the sake of Who we think is Love. It is not too controversial to suggest that love leads to human flourishing. Underpinning the triplet, Free Will, is the belief that God’s love has entrusted us with the ability to decide how we will live in this world. This poem shows God as not interfering with our choices and decisions.

19 Fleming, Draw Me Into Your Friendship. Unless otherwise stated, I change Ignatius’ gendered language to gender-inclusive language. The otherwise masculine language such as Lord and King will be avoided with respect to the context of the problematic patriarchal issue raised more particularly by female exertants.
Free will

You are vulnerable to our choices
Your gift makes us responsible

I offer the following principle and foundation, which underpins my work:

Woman and man are created out of love for love. We know that God loves man and woman because God is vulnerable in the face of the ultimate gift of free will. In union with God, woman and man find God’s desires are their own deep desires. In union with God, all parts of creation live God’s desires to be, to give and to receive. In created life, all things have the capacity to be blessing and curse. Man and woman can respond fruitfully to God’s gifts by choosing that which helps in the progress of love, and refusing that which hinders love.

I desire that the Principle and Foundation underpins my work, and there are many moments when it is compatible and resonant with what I live. There are more specific influences that enhance or challenge my capacity to be open to views not my own. This latter deep story involves:

• I am a woman in a patriarchal institutional Church
• I am wounded by non-finite grief in relation to gender discrimination in the Church\(^\text{20}\)
• Truth is a higher value than power
• I esteem participation and collaboration over hierarchy and autocracy
• God empowers me in my life
• I am anointed by God\(^\text{21}\)
• My body is in tune with the life cycle of nature
• I read the book of nature more than any other book
• I understand myself as nurturer more than provider
• I am more interested in relationships than structures
• I am more attuned to intuitive knowing than rational thought

\(^{20}\) Non-finite grief is that which cannot be resolved fully due to its ongoing nature. The exclusion by the Catholic Church of women from Holy Orders is a non-finite grief for many people.

\(^{21}\) For me, ‘anointing’ means that by birthright I am enabled by God’s grace to be the created person God has desired. I am not referring to an outward sign of anointing (by oil) through any religious ritual or Sacrament such as Baptism or Holy Orders. I am referring to a deeper inherent anointing by God.
• I am more interested in process than product
• I evaluate qualitatively rather than quantitatively
• I trust my feelings and my imagination
• Aesthetics and beauty make me feel safe
• My primary relationship is with my husband, who has shown Christ to me
• I will relinquish everything for my family's sake
• Interior calm is more important than material possessions
• Personal growth is a high priority even if it engenders periods of instability.

My personal principle and foundation ensues from unconscious myths as well. I need to listen to the stories which have formed me and which I anticipate will reveal God’s presence in them. Through poetry, narrative and dialogue with other sources, I will reflect on my presuppositions about experiences of poetry, prayer, faith, Ignatius, God and God’s presence in the lives of people today.

d. Weeks of the Exercises

Ignatius divided the retreat of the Spiritual Exercises into four phases known as Weeks. These are not traditional seven-day weeks, but vary in length according to the stages of the retreat. As I explore the graces received during the Four Weeks of the retreat in daily life, I will reflect on the phenomenon of poetry writing, redrafting and editing, and the impact of poetry on the poet, the hearer, the reader and the whole research setting of the culture of spiritual direction in the context of Ignatian spirituality. As a giver of the Exercises and spiritual director, I have witnessed poetry touch people profoundly inviting them into new self-awareness and awareness of their relationship with God. This emerging awareness impacts ministry and the way of being ‘church’ into the future.

Throughout this thesis I will use upper case Week instead of lower case week when referring to the Four Weeks of the Exercises. This will reduce any confusion between a normal seven-day week and the variable length of Weeks as understood by Ignatius.
Dynamics of the Weeks

Earthed\textsuperscript{22}

... Earth
for a time, let me
merge in you.

The experience of being grounded, being one with nature with all its seasons, contemplating balance, loss, latency and life, was and is expansive in my prayer. It emerged within the Four Weeks of the Exercises and underpinned the chapters, Joy, Life, Suffering and Revelation of an ordinary woman, which I wrote as I prayed the Exercises. My journal and the Directory of the Spiritual Exercises developed in my third and final year of the Arrupe Program for Forming Givers of the Spiritual Exercises, spoke directly to the seasons. Autumn and winter, for example, spoke of liminality and hidden potential.

The four Pots of Grace represent the seasons of the Spiritual Exercises\textsuperscript{21}. They have elements of hiddenness and promise or shadow and light, experienced in the human journey towards wholeness. These haiku ‘pots of grace’ express part of my experience of the seasons or Weeks of the Exercises:

Pots of Grace

1.
gold well in river
elusive unexplored mine
sunset explosion

2.
red vine leaf
trembles on bough
wafts up a spiral

\textsuperscript{22} Marburg, An Ordinary Woman, 73.

\textsuperscript{23} Haiku is a three-lined Japanese poem with nature references. It is usually of 17 syllables dispersed in the three lines as 5-7-5. This form is often modified in English.
3.
naked black branches
cupped to the sky
shuddering

4.
row of prunus
barren boughs shiver
shawl of blossom

I have summarized the four haiku respectively in words showing the flow of my own overall Spiritual Exercises Retreat. The flow is shown in a circular model to represent the dynamic and cyclic nature of the Retreat, and how the movements of the Retreat continue throughout life:

![Circular diagram of retreat stages](image)

Fig. 1. The experience of the Retreat

a. The cycle of graces

The dynamics of the Weeks of the Exercises are outlined by Schemel and Roemer as:

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24 George J Schemel and Roemer, Judith A. *Beyond Individuation to Discipleship: A Directory for Those Who Give the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (ISCEP Group, 2000). 21-22. The dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises is consistently named by scholars as the classical paradigm of purgation → illumination → union. These stages are successive and correspond to the dynamic of 5-6th century Dionysius’ stages in perfection, and 12th century Bernard of Clairvaux (kiss of the feet → kiss of the
These movements are the process and outcomes of receiving the particular graces of the Exercises. The words I have chosen to express my experience are in the diagrams below. My experience affirms two distinct movements in the Exercises: Weeks One and Two are about being loved and called, the character of God’s initiative towards a person; Weeks Three and Four are about the character of human response to God’s initiative, that is, being dedicated and loving. The overall dynamic therefore can be expressed as:
b. Experience of encountering God

The experience of a person in relation to God through the Weeks might be:

Known ➔ Desired ➔ Valued ➔ Commissioned

c. Response to encountering God

A person’s response to these four experiences of God might be expressed as:

Wonder ➔ Presence ➔ Self-Abandonment ➔ Ministry

Each of the Weeks might have the character of all or some of the movements. The graces are not received in a linear, cumulative movement. The dynamics of the Exercises are personal and often move in a deepening spiral pattern of growth. I have drawn all these elements together in one flow chart to show the character of God’s companionship of empowerment in the dynamic journey of the Spiritual Exercises.
Fig. 4. Graced aspects of the Weeks

**Becoming a spiritual director and a giver of the Exercises**

As a spiritual director in the Ignatian tradition, I have been privileged to witness the dynamics of the Exercises in other people expressed in a variety of ways. It is especially a privilege to accompany a person’s experience of God’s grace in the darkest and most painful experiences of life, as represented by the dynamics of Week Three. The poetry in this thesis emerges from and explores God’s invitational presence amidst all things dark and light.

Those who give and receive the Spiritual Exercises know their life-giving power. Without exception, the many people I have guided through the full Spiritual Exercises since 2006 under [19] and [20] have found them to be a source of graced empowerment for new endeavours and ministries. My own consolation of the Spiritual Exercises led me from working part-time in medical imaging and parish ministry, to spiritual direction training in the three-year Arrupe Program for the Formation of Givers of the
Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius at Campion Centre of Ignatian Spirituality in Kew, Melbourne. I am now a formator for the same Program.

Poetry as Vocation

Writing and exploring poetry is vocational. It is in the flow of God’s desires united with my deepest desires. It is implicit then that I am one with the poem and God is to be found in the poem.

My writing emerges from inspiration into a stream of conscious associations, but I know that my unconscious levels of meaning impact my conscious expressions. I know a poem is finished when it is cogent and sound, and has a title, but the poem is not necessarily finished with me. It offers more insight as I contemplate its invitation.

I do not suggest that this is the only way to write poetry because I know many poets who write simply for the joy of words, to paint word-pictures, to convert readers to their way of thinking, to challenge, to be generative, to affirm their own existence as meaningful and other ways discussed in this work.

My way of writing poetry is less about the words and more about the way the words weave or wrap themselves in and around a person’s life. My relationship with the reader and personal truth are important to me. Most of my poetry is written from a desire to express something of the complexity of life and my emotional attachment to it, and to affirm the presence of God deeply within as I write. This is sacred to me. I cannot not write.

a. Poetry: adaptation of the Exercises

In his discourse to Rome in 2002, the Father General of the Society of Jesus, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach wrote:

The experience of making the Spiritual Exercises involves four actors: God, Ignatius, the one who gives and the one who makes the Exercises … these actors do not have invariable roles limited to certain defined activities. ... Ignatius frees his experience to a
thousand adaptations and interpretations ... God as an actor never fails to surprise in the Ignatian experience.  

Poetry is one adaptation in giving and receiving the Exercises. It can be used as one or more of the meditations, as a way of engaging with the experience of encountering the content of scripture, a way of grappling with a situation, or a journaling tool, all of which are prayer.

Theology

The theology that underpins my life begins with God as the ineffable source of all that is. This work identifies with a Celtic-panentheistic theology. The universe as revelation of God makes God accessible and knowable to a meaningful extent. God relates to the world as the present dynamic lover of all things, and is the source of being, knowing and loving. God is present, sustaining the unfolding human experience of wholeness, the integration of body, mind and spirit. From this is inferred that God desires the unity of all things. I affirm John Dominic Crossan’s idea of God’s ‘companionship of empowerment’ to persons, as it asserts itself in a dynamic living relationship of discovery and freedom, of ‘self-appropriation and self-transcendence’. It is not a static goal or something to be attained.

‘Companionship of empowerment’ is a contemporary way of speaking about the doctrine of the Trinity – a third century C.E. construct important to Ignatius which attempts to define the relationships within God. However, the traditional names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity, are alienating to many men and women because of their masculine reference. I have spoken about ‘God’ in genderless terms. I understand Jesus Christ as the self-revelation of God who was embodied and suffered with us. In a sense Christ continues to suffer in people who oppose worldly values (for example: status, money and power), and receive the judgements that Jesus received.

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26 Panentheism. (Gk. Pan-en-theism = all-in-God) God is present in all things. All things are in God. Without God nothing exists. This is not the same as saying all things are God, as in Pantheism.
Jesus showed love for himself and for us by refusing to sacrifice his authentic relationship with God. This is his genuine gift revealing God’s love and respect for human persons and their suffering endured for the sake of authenticity. The ‘companionship of empowerment’ is how the Spirit of God is understood as the empowering presence of God in us and in our everyday lives. This is the experience of resurrection.

Faith

I understand faith as a gift accessible to all from a magnanimous, loving God. This faith is not blind but is a response to the multiple, varied experiences in which God participates. We cannot concretely see God, but faith does not depend on empirical evidence as its only source. Faith is belief, trust, hope and action which takes account of all the faculties which make us human. It is concerned with the presence of a dynamic, relational, interactive and sustaining source known through creativity, relationships, felt-knowledge, and especially love. Faith is neither linear nor ‘containable’ in propositions, rather it is complex and is understood in the area of symbols and metaphors. This thesis engages faith, believing in the presence of God in all things.

I believe that God desires us into being every moment. God delights in the unfolding of difference, and we participate in this loving mystery. God speaks through silence as much as sound, through absence equally as presence, through chaos and harmony alike. All things invite an awareness of what it might mean to be created in the ‘image of God’ as the Yahwist says in Genesis 1.26: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.”

29 The ‘Yahwist’ is the name given to one of the four writer(s) of the Hexateuch (Torah) texts, who consistently uses ‘Yahweh’ (YHWH or Hebrew יהוה) as the name for God. This work does not attempt an exegesis of Genesis 1.26. However, I understand creation as dynamic ongoing sustaining presence in God, expressed throughout time and place. I understand ‘us’ and ‘our’ in its historical and polytheistic origins, but I believe ‘us’ and ‘our’ has power for us to express something of the relationship expressed in Christian Trinitarian doctrine formulated at the Council of Nicaea.
Christology

In regard to a variety of Christologies evident in the first century gospel of Mark where Jesus asks the disciples ‘Who do people say that I am?’ (Mk 8.27), and Jesus receives the reply: John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the other prophets, poet Peter Steele says: ‘There is, after all, more than one way of answering the question ‘Who do you say that I am.’”

Peter, the apostle, replies ‘You are the Christ’ (Mk 8.29). ‘Christ’ (Gk. anointed one) refers to Jesus Christ who, in personhood, is understood as the divine self-revelation of the nature and character of God. Through the incarnated Christ, we encounter one who engages life fully and authentically. We encounter Christ who shows us that intellect, feeling, imagination, passion and action are integrated in infinite love which is our desire and longing, and which relinquishes earthly life for the sake of love.

In kairos time, Jesus is eternally present. In our deepest desires, the relationship possible with Jesus Christ is one of friendship and mutuality. Jesus models this relationship of love in every encounter depicted in the gospels; in his teaching, conversations, healings and miracles. He shows his way of love in moments of anger and compassion, of weeping and celebrating. He shows love in times of solitude where he nurtures and loves his interior life. He embraced what Greek philosopher Plutarch was yet to speak in the first century CE: “What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality.”

Jesus’ relationship of love is shown in:

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father (God) I have made known to you. (John 15.15 NIV)

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31 Kairos time is beyond temporal impermanence, and is forever present. Chronos time is everyday clock time which comes and passes. Both are Greek in origin.
Jesus’ love is equally shown in the story where, frustrated by institutionalized misconduct, he turned over the temple tables (Matthew 21.12).

Ontology

Ontology

All is as it seems

The quiet of prayer
magnifies my breath and beat

In rapid sleep my eyes search
the inner world
hidden from all but you

Earth turns without resistance
without avoidance

You rotate your hand and it is light
I cling effortlessly
find Eden at every turn.

I am here because You are

I believe that all persons are created intrinsically good. Conflict between creative and destructive tendencies is the challenge of every human person seeking genuine freedom. I do not accept the Augustinian philosophy that persons are fundamentally evil and they must use everything in their power to overcome evil.  

Self-appropriation is about awareness of self, feelings, desires, knowing who I am and why I choose or do certain things. Self-transcendence or dynamic self-realisation involves free choices to move towards God in a personal, dynamic relationship. This outward movement to God is at the same time an inward movement towards God, and is

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mirrored in a person’s contemplative stance to the whole of life. Self-transcendence does not leave the ‘self’ behind, but becomes more of who the ‘self’ is. Self-transcendence is my desire as poet and spiritual director, and is experienced as active union with God’s desire for self and others.

In Ignatian spirituality, the opposite of self-transcendence is ‘sin’. Sin is distorted action under the influence of personal compulsions, addictions and atrophy. Ruth Burrows aptly argues that ‘God is not glorified by half persons’.\(^{35}\) This thesis tries to balance the two areas of self-appropriation and self-transcendence, and presents a way of being present to each dimension of the person, the whole person and the community of which the person is a part.

The chapters

In Chapter One, *The Spiritual Exercises: Apostolic Endeavour*, I introduce Ignatius, the sixteenth century saint who developed the Spiritual Exercises. I show how his life was foundational to his writing. The chapter includes the story of Ignatius’ religious conversion, his relationships with the Church and with others, and how his life interacted with his faith. I explain the nature and purpose of Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, and offer an explanation of grace. I describe the frame of the Spiritual Exercises, the power of the imagination and desire within the prayer of the Exercises as vehicles of encountering and receiving God’s grace. I begin to engage my story and show how it relates to my poetry and Ignatian spirituality. I show the ministerial outcome of having engaged in poetry and the Spiritual Exercises as the freedom to be a poet, writer and spiritual director.

Chapter Two, *Methodology: Poetic Autoethnography*, explains why my methodology is appropriate to the present research. It shows the inquiry is built on a participative paradigm in so far as it respects biographical, historical, religious and cultural aspects in framing and forming the thesis. In the same way as writing poetry is a liminal experience, the thesis emerges and unfolds in liminality from which the past and present

can build a way into the future. The chapter discloses underpinning epistemological, and axiological frameworks of myself as both researched and researcher. As researchers always view research from a subjective perspective, researchers are always subjects in the inquiries in which they are engaged, and as such have a right to participate in creating a methodological design which intends to research them.36

Chapter Three, Poetry: Encounter and Spiritual Exercise, shows the ways in which writing and encountering poetry is a spiritual exercise. It addresses what is specific to poetry as distinct from other forms of writing. The chapter speaks about the journey of the poem as a journey of life or a journey through the Spiritual Exercises: from inspiration to birth, finding audible and inaudible voice, and the form and content which contribute to the integrity of the poem. The chapter explores the poet’s epistemological, psychological and psychosomatic experiences in the act of writing poetry and how poetry writing is an integrated exercise consistent with an Exercise in the Spiritual Exercises.

The chapter also speaks about the way a poet conceives a poem, and the way a person might experience an encounter with a poem. It addresses the way a spiritual director might listen to a person as a poet listens to a poem. The chapter contends that poetry is a powerful spiritual exercise in which a person encounters God and hears the invitation to deeper awareness of self and God, and the potential to actualise her vocation.

Chapter Four, Discernment: Poetry Writing, Re-drafting and Spiritual Direction discusses interior freedom as a way of listening to God. It shows that attentiveness to interior movements involving body, mind and spirit, and using the Ignatian rules for the discernment of spirits assist the poet in the re-drafting and editing stages of creating authentic and integrated poetry. Discernment and decision-making are fundamental to writing poetry, to spiritual direction and to the prayerful journey of the Spiritual Exercises. The chapter claims that a poem can be both prayer and discerned action.

Chapter Five, Inspiration for the Spiritual Director, is a creative chapter showing the character of poetic listening which enhances spiritual direction. The chapter offers

ways in which the non-poet can use poetry in spiritual direction and in giving the Exercises so as to further the nurturing and commissioning goals of the Exercises. The chapter clarifies the nature of the poet’s self-disclosure in spiritual direction showing how the quality of presence offered by the poet-spiritual director models the quality of presence God offers. The chapter also demonstrates how writing poetry might be used as a self-supervision tool for spiritual directors and others in similar ministries. Finally it addresses the possibility of poetry as a pathway between spiritual seekers of various ages and faiths.

Chapters Six to Ten address my engagement with my story in the context of Ignatian spirituality especially the Four Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises. I show through poetic autoethnography the way in which the graces of the Four Weeks are evident. The Spiritual Exercises are important insofar as they have opened a way for me to engage with God through Jesus Christ in an ongoing personal relationship. This relationship has a profoundly transformative effect on all my relationships including that with myself. The relationship empowers my life in ministry.

Included in this section of the thesis are two first person litanies which are examples of raw poetry. The first person litany is text from the relevant chapter with all but the first person material extracted. This technique distils the material and focuses on the inner world of the speaker offering the possibility of poignant listening. It is a technique described by Gilligan et al as offering a footprint of the psyche and an embodied unique voice of the first-person writer. This way of writing litany-poems confronts the person with poignant truth, and invites careful spiritual discernment towards the goals of the Spiritual Exercises. I use this genre in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Chapter Six, *The Poetic Dossier: Inter-Generational Order and Disorder* is an historical and speculative work which anticipates that writing poetry, as I engage with ancestral photographs and memorabilia, will further my self-understanding and disentangle grace and disgrace in my relationships. This chapter addresses the graces of Week One of the Spiritual Exercises. Week One brings into focus personal disorder,

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and makes the connections between personal, social and global disorder. The chapter asks if a flawed and disordered life can be loved and transformed into one with interior freedom and meaning. The poetry and prose focus on intergenerational factors in shame and guilt, and the way these factors help or hinder the reception of God’s love. In this chapter, I show the poetic and personal outcome of praying with the family photographs and memorabilia.

Chapter Seven, Week Two: Re-Imagining Margins begins with my own story as a marginalised woman in the Roman Catholic Church. The chapter shows that Jesus did not exclude women from relationship with him or ministry. The imaginative contemplations explore the way in which one non-Jewish woman challenged Jesus to relinquish institutionalised religious values. Another imaginative contemplation shows Jesus attending to the marginalised woman with a haemorrhage.

If there is any suggestion that Jesus was ‘meek and mild’, this chapter portrays Jesus with heightened emotions, expressing anger in ways which contemporary society often judges as inappropriate. The paradox in the poetry of this chapter surprised me because it is revealed and welcomed marginalised parts of the self. If I am to know, love and follow Christ, which is the grace of Week Two, then I am to examine ways in my life which are contrary to a life in Christ. I am to revere God as the one who shows me the way. The chapter ends with an invitation to mystical union, the experience and action which integrates all parts of the self.

Chapter Eight, Week Three: Poetic Companion to Suffering approaches Week Three with a movement of sorrow and respect for grief and loss. This Third Week of the Exercises asks the praying person to be a friend to Jesus in his suffering [193]. I received the grace of Week Three by my conscious choice to be present to my own non-finite grief. The poetry affirms sorrow as an important part of the human journey. It demonstrates the gift of compassion available to any person.

Chapter Nine, Weeks Four: Transition to Joy is about the inseparability of suffering and joy. I show through reflecting on my relationships with my father and mother, how joy is eventually a choice a person makes in order to live life fruitfully. The poetry shows
that joy comes in various ways and is the inspiration for an apostolic endeavour such as Ignatius himself experienced.

Chapter Ten *Four Weeks in One Hour* focuses on how a visit to the maternal grandmother of our child who is adopted was a discernment in God’s grace. This chapter engages the narrative in poetry and prose, and shows how the graces of all Four Weeks of the Exercises were deepened through writing. The grace of empathy in this visit again shows the intimate relationship between suffering and joy. I draw a parallel between various aspects of the visit in relation to visitation stories in the gospels.

The encounter with the grandmother and the encounter with myself in poetry shows how alike humans are as we try to grieve and embrace life after loss. The chapter relates and discusses how the graces of the Spiritual Exercises are lived in everyday life as a spiral, and not linear pattern. The chapter affirms the possibility of the reception of grace when two vulnerable and open women meet at the point of their desire, and shows the outcome of accepting God’s invitation to receive and give love.

Chapter Eleven *Conclusion: Now and Not Yet* draws together the threads of the thesis. It outlines the learning in terms of the relationship of grace to the prayer and poetry. The chapter reflects on the methodology’s input to the thesis and its impact on my formation. The chapter comments on the themes of grief, discrimination of women, abuse, healing and love which have inspired the thesis and become clearer within it. The chapters suggests personal growth edges and possibilities for further research.

Poetry is an aural and visual art. The sound, cadence, rhythm, the use of long or short vowels, the space and shape that it takes on the page, the stanzas, the line length and many other features come together to speak from the poet’s conscious or unconscious truth. In this work, I explore poetry as a self-awareness tool, a tool for growing personal integration and interconnectedness between self and others. As a general principle, poetry can be the ‘other’ against whom the reader defines him or herself. It can also be the other with whom the reader finds a sense of belonging and connectedness with all humanity. I join with Alizadeh and Wilkinson in their manifesto of non-fiction poetry’s contribution to learning:
Too often poetry has been filed in the “too hard” basket and deemed “irrelevant” and “inaccessible”. This declaration calls for an end to the mistreatment and marginalisation of poetic language; an end to the segregation of poetry from and by the authoritative discourse of prose. We summon forth the potential of poetry to expand our perceptions of the “real”.

The present work is written from that platform. It presumes that poetry is a significant contributor to many learning disciplines. The process of writing poetry is rigorous in itself. The poetry in this work has had many incarnations, just as I have had many transforming moments since I encountered Ignatian spirituality through the Spiritual Exercises.

Let God be the you God wants to be.

Introduction

This chapter situates the present thesis in Ignatian spirituality. It explains the emergence of this spirituality from its founder, Ignatius of Loyola. Almost five centuries after Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*, the commentaries are still largely written by Jesuit men. Jesuits are men belonging to the Society of Jesus which Ignatius of Loyola co-founded. Ignatius wrote the book of the *Spiritual Exercises* as a legacy to both men and women who wanted to grow in their Christian faith.

By way of background to further chapters I offer, in poetry and prose, a woman’s exploration and perspective on:

- The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola
- Ignatius of Loyola: his life and writings
- The Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises
- The Graces of the Weeks
- Ignatius’ writing style
- Religious scruples
- Renaissance and contemporary worlds
- Parallel stories
- The authority of life
The Spiritual Exercises

The following poem explains how I came to do the Spiritual Exercises, but it does not say why I was on a weekend retreat. I had come to be reconciled with myself in relation to a clerical violation that had occurred many years earlier.

Retreat in daily life

For everything there is a season.¹

A weekend retreat;
the first one in years.
A time to be here,
a time to hear

You should do the Exercises.²

What are they?

A 30 day Retreat or
Retreat in Daily Life over 30 weeks.

I wrote the application,
sent the story
about God writing story in me.

A spiritual director phoned.³ We met
each Wednesday for an hour.
I prayed the Spiritual Exercises
every day for an hour,

¹ The Bible. Ecclesiastes 3.1.
² ‘Spiritual Exercises’ refers to one or more of the Ignatian Exercises. ‘Spiritual Exercises’ refers to the actual text as a whole. ‘spiritual exercises’ refers to any exercise of prayer from any tradition. The inverted commas will not be used in the present thesis. The whole text of the Spiritual Exercises, of which David L Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises, a Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading (Saint Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), is one translation, is divided into numbered paragraphs and/or sections called Annotations [1-22] or Notations [23 – ]. In the present thesis, numbers written this way refer to the translation of the original text.
³ The spiritual director was my ‘giver’ of the Exercises.
every night for a quarter.

For thirty weeks
I imagined and hoped to grow
from genesis to revelation.

I shared about my prayer,
what I thought and felt.
I tried to be perfect in prayer,
and found that perfect was flawed.

Sometimes you just have to be weak
to bring you to some greater awareness
or to do some special ministry.\textsuperscript{4}

I knew how Ignatius got bad eyes.
He cried for love, in love
because he was loved.

I was a small pilgrim with God
with Jesus and strangely with Mary
his mother. I was told
Ignatius companioned me; but
I was not exercised by the thought.

Jesus was there every day
I prayed those streets of Palestine,
grappled in the wilderness,
witnessed Jews in the synagogues,

felt angst and rage,
pain and love; especially love.

\textit{Jesus I will follow you}
\textit{if it costs me everything.}

I completed the Exercises
and kept exercising my desire
to follow. Today I choose
to find God in it all.

a. My life as ‘poem’

I have found the *Spiritual Exercises* ‘with its heavy accent on God’s grace’ is a prototype for all life and life relationships.⁵ I cannot speak adequately of the formative experience of the Spiritual Exercises through a single poem, because my desire is that all of my life be a poem. I am a lover of Australia, the red outback, the expanses of yellow thirsty country, blue skies and brown hills. Natural imagery and the natural cycle of life became metaphors for my own spiritual journey. The poem *at home* offers a way of speaking about the power of the Exercises to help me, an Australian woman, be at home with herself and her environment.

*at home*

in time and place
pausing between towns
moving inland
to the swag on red carpet

I watch stars
shiny spilt milk across the black
and listen to swish scramble slither
under spinifex flick of tail
birdsong softening at dusk
silence strong and wise

at home dreaming
the rock sacred place
shared breath and heartbeat

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shelter of plump root dwellers
ants tracking the powdery ground
rain-soaked grubs surfacing

at home I rise and dance
rhapsody courting my soul
moving with you

The poem *Giving the Spiritual Exercises* is connected to the Annotations of the Exercises. In the following section, I have interspersed the poem with the relevant Annotations.6

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**Giving the Spiritual Exercises**

Let there be nothing
between pen and point;
nothing between you and God.

The person who gives ... ought to ... [go] over the points with only a short or summary development [2] and let God be in direct relationship with the person [15].

Let the poetry of prayer open
your heart right down the sternum.

For it is not in knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul [2].

Let God have God's way with you.

It is very helpful to him who is receiving the Exercises to enter them with great courage and generosity towards his Creator and Lord offering him all his will and liberty that His Divine Majesty may make use of his person and of all he has according to His most holy will [5].

Let God be the you God wants to be.

He who is giving the Exercises ought not to influence him who is receiving them more to poverty or to a promise, than

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to their opposites, nor more to one state or way of life than another [15].

If I am to have one love, one desire
it is to feel all there is,

[Let him be] informed of the various movements which the
different spirits put in him. For according as is more or less
useful for him [receiver], he [giver] can give him some
exercises suited and adapted to the need of such a soul so
acted upon [17].

and to witness your sense of yourself
as a firework fountain bursting
the night sky.

Let the end for which man is created be explained to him
[19]. The more our soul finds itself … approach[ing] Him,
The more it disposes itself to receive graces and gifts from
His Divine and Sovereign Goodness [20].

The book of the *Spiritual Exercises* developed over time as Ignatius gave spiritual exercises to men and women wherever he travelled. In our contemporary world, the giver of the Exercises is a spiritual director trained to give the Exercises according to Ignatius’ instructions. In the daily [20] or weekly [19] meeting, the receiver of the Exercises (directee) shares the content and responses of his or her prayer.

There are two main ways the Exercises are given: from the ‘outside-in’ or the ‘inside-
out’. Giving the Exercises from the ‘outside-in’ focuses on the content of the
Exercises which are systematically given to the person who prays them and reports
the experience of prayer to the giver.

Giving the Exercises from the ‘inside-out’ focuses on the person and what is
happening in his or her experience. This experience of prayer is the basis of deciding
what Exercise might be helpful at a particular point in time, and what might invite
personal freedom. Giving the Exercises in this way is spiritual direction. In all kinds
of spiritual direction the prayer and life story of the directee are the content of the

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7 Santiago Arzubialde, “The Development of the Exercises: Recognizing the Spirit,” *The Way* 50, no. 4 (October, 2011). ‘Over time’ refers only to the years between 1522-1541. In this article the author examines the Helyar text which is comprised of notes ‘written by an English priest, John Helyar, while making the Spiritual Exercises in Paris, probably with Pierre Favre, in 1535.’ This is the earliest written version of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*. (79). Arzubialde gives a time line of the development of the text in relation to the rules for the discernment of spirits (page 95).
shared hour. Both director and directee have as their mutual focus the directee’s relationship with God.

A directee’s experience is enhanced by a spiritual director who has been well-formed. As Wilkie Au says, ‘transformed people transform people’. This transformation can only emerge from committed interior reflection and subsequent decision-making through God’s empowering grace. As previously stated, I speak of grace as a general term for gifts which come from being in life-giving relationship with God.

b. Frame of prayer in the Spiritual Exercises

The Spiritual Exercises are divided into Four ‘Weeks’ of unequal duration. ‘Weeks’ are stages in the Exercises rather than actual periods of time. In them are found the broad sweep of life’s patterns or seasons. These Exercises are offered in 30-35 days as a live-in retreat, or in 30-35 weeks as the Retreat in daily life. Many shorter retreats are adapted in accordance with [18] for people as they grow in the knowledge and experience of God’s love, and in their response of love.

The Exercises are comprised of 370 points of guidance which, for the purposes of the present work, I will name as Annotations or Notations. The Annotations [1-22] guide a person towards an open disposition in giving and receiving the Exercises.

Disposition for the Spiritual Exercises

Preparation takes as long as it takes

to receive God;

to know that you are loved.

The supplementary material outlines many points and helps towards fruitful meditation of the Four Weeks. These include ‘Rules for Discerning the Movement of Spirits’ [313-336], for ‘Understanding Scruples’ [345-351], ‘Guidelines for Thinking with the Church’ [352-370], and ‘Rules for Sharing and Giving Alms’ [337-343]. The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits are central to Ignatian spirituality and require reinterpretation and adaptation for the 21st century.

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8 Wilkie Au. Notes from Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon workshop 24 July 2012 at Campion Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Kew, Australia.
When there is a question of discernment of spirits and discernment of God’s will, Ignatius’s name comes to mind as at least one of the preeminent teachers – and perhaps as one of unparalleled influence.\(^9\)

In [19] of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius suggests a pattern of one and one-half hours of prayer each day including the Examen prayer at the end of the day.\(^10\) The Examen is a personal reflection in relation to what was or was not life-giving on that day.

The pattern of prayer for [20] is facilitated by withdrawal from everyday activities and includes intensified meditation on the specific Exercises in four or five hours of prayer each day for the full 30-35 days of the retreat.

c. The Spiritual Exercises: a frame to grow in relationship with God

Poetry is a gospel outcome of my life engagement with God through the Spiritual Exercises, and the book of the *Spiritual Exercises* is Ignatius’ ‘gospel’ outcome of his life.\(^11\) The Exercises are written, as any Christian gospel, to a particular audience, from a faith perspective. The *Spiritual Exercises* are a guidance manual or tool for a spiritual director in giving the Exercises in order to nurture a growing relationship with God and facilitate personal freedom in the directee. Freedom in this instance means release from the influences of personally diminishing thoughts, feelings and behaviours, so as to engage in life-giving action.

Engagement with the Exercises invites an apostolic or active outcome which becomes the person’s gospel. In the preliminary note to the ‘Contemplation to Gain Love’[230], situated in the Fourth Week of the *Exercises*, Ignatius says ‘Love ought be put more in deeds than words’. This is reminiscent of the letter from James, who says ‘Faith by itself if it has no works is dead’ (Jas 2.17 NRSV). This belief and practice is critical to Ignatian spirituality.


\(^10\) A person receiving the Spiritual Exercises is also an ‘exercitant’. In the present work, the words ‘directee’, ‘receiver (of the Exercises)’ and exercitant are used interchangeably, although a person who receives spiritual direction is normally called a ‘directee’ or ‘pilgrim’, and would not be called an ‘exercitant’ or ‘receiver’.

\(^11\) As in the Introduction, I refer to ‘gospel’ in this instance as written foundational faith statements.
d. Purpose of the Spiritual Exercises

Ignatius of Loyola co-founded the Society of Jesus. This companionship was formally approved as an order of priests through Pope Paul III in 1540, the same pope who approved Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* in 1548. When asked by Gonzales de Camara, about how the Spiritual Exercises were composed, Ignatius said:

> the Exercises were ... things that he had observed in his own soul and found useful and which he thought would be useful to others ... in particular ... [the] variety of movement of spirits and thoughts that he experienced …

Modras says that in totality, Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* are:

> a teacher’s handbook with detailed directions on how to help people look at their lives, pray, take note of what’s going on in themselves and their lives, and make a decision. Amid conflicting inclinations, how can one hear the voice of a God who speaks in the stillness of the heart? Amid our many options, how can we discover our deepest authentic desires, God’s way of calling us?

I recently read a summation of [21] of the Exercises from an anonymous author who claimed that the object of the book of the *Spiritual Exercises* ‘is to convince man of sin, of justice and judgment’. Having experienced the full Spiritual Exercises in daily life [19], I disagree with this author. I cannot imagine that my personal outcome of freedom and love, can be anything but Ignatius’ purpose. In the literal translation of the Spanish ‘autograph’ by Father Elder Mullan SJ, in [21] Ignatius states the purpose of the Exercises is ‘to conquer oneself and regulate one’s life without determining oneself through any tendency that is disordered [21].

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12 The Society of Jesus (Jesuit) is an apostolic male religious order. Members of the Society are priests or brothers. The formation of these men is rigorous, involving secular and religious studies and ministerial engagement. [http://www.jesuitvocation.org.au/stages-of-formation](http://www.jesuitvocation.org.au/stages-of-formation). Among the women-religious who have the same or similar basic Rule as the Society of Jesus are The Faithful Companions of Jesus and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

13 Key companions were fellow Spanish students at the University — Francis Xavier, Alfonso Salmeron, Diego Laynez, and Nicholas Bobadilla; Peter Faber, a Frenchman; and Simão Rodrigues of Portugal. In August, 1534, at the Church of Our Lady of the Martyrs, at Montmartre, Loyola and his six companions, of whom only one was a priest, met and made solemn vows regarding their lifelong work. Joseph N Tylenda, *A Pilgrim’s Journey: The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola* Revised ed. (Ignatius Press, 2001). 154-5.


I offer a contemporary interpretation:

The Spiritual Exercises are to balance one’s life in harmony with God's loving desires and to bring one to freedom through rejection of one’s destructive life patterns and embodiment of what is life-giving.

After his conversion, Ignatius’ own life was directed towards this purpose which he understood in terms of what gave praise and service of God. David Fleming’s contemporary reading of [21] is consistent with my experience.

The structure of these exercises has the purpose of leading a person to a true spiritual freedom. We grow into this freedom by gradually bringing an order of values into our lives so that we find at the moment of choice or decision we are not swayed by any disordered love.17

Ignatius of Loyola: life and writings

a. Writings

Apart from authoring the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius reluctantly dictated an account of his life to fellow Jesuit, Luis Gonçalves da Camara, in 1553. This book is usually referred to as an autobiography. A distinguishing feature of this ‘autobiography’ is that Ignatius speaks about himself in the third person.18 It is as if God acts upon him, and Ignatius is the observer.

O’Rourke-Boyle describes the autobiography of Saint Ignatius as an epideictic work, meaning a rhetorical work ‘invented from the self about God’.19 Ignatius’ work can be considered epideictic or autobiographical, in that it is personal, creative, dynamic and interpretive. Likewise there are dynamic elements in the present poetic autoethnography, that is, my views change as I write. The poems that I write stand for a moment in time. They are a platform from which I write the next poem.

Story-telling in parables was Jesus’ normal teaching tool. The gospel of Mark shows that Jesus interpreted the parables for his disciples (Mark 4.34). The autobiography

17 Fleming. Draw Me into Your Friendship. 23.
of Saint Ignatius is an Ignatian gospel. It tells and interprets his story. Ignatius models discipleship which self-author-izes his ongoing gospel.

Ignatius also wrote the *Constitutions* (1550), *Spiritual Diary* (discernment process recorded 1544-5), and a substantial number of letters. His apostolic work was in philanthropy, administration, education, and accompanying and guiding people through spiritual exercises.

b. Ignatius’ early life

Iñigo de Loyola (1491 – 31 July 1556) known as Ignatius of Loyola was the youngest son of thirteen children born to noble parents Don Beltrán Yañez de Oñez y Loyola and Marina Saenz de Lleona y Balda, 25 years after their marriage, in the castle of Loyola above Azpeitia in Guipuscoa in the Basque region of Spain. Maria de Garin nursed him at her home, presumably after his mother died. He was raised by Magdalena de Aráoz, wife of Ignatius’ elder brother Martin Garcia at Casa Torre, Loyola. When Ignatius was fifteen, he was invited by family friend, Juan Velázquez de Cuéllar, the chief treasurer to King Ferdinand, to become a page to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella in Arévelo and to be educated as a Castilian gentleman. He served Velázquez there for eleven years in which time he learned the etiquette of court, horse-riding, fencing, dancing and singing. It is likely also that he was besotted by the 15 year-old Spanish Queen, Germaine de Foix, who had married Ferdinand after Isabella died.

Ignatius’ exposure to courtly life was instrumental in learning the expectations of Catholic Spain’s religio-political rule. This assisted his later call to give account of himself to the Inquisition’s authorities. Spiritual wisdom came slowly. Ignatius engaged an excessive and material life, disregarding religious austerity. In art and history, he is shown to be elegant and overstated in:

> flowing cape and … tight-fitting hose and boots. A sword and dagger were at his waist and his long curly hair rested on his shoulders, and his cap proudly sported a feather.

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20 Inigo of Loyola was born prior to October 23, 1491. Tylenda. *A Pilgrim’s Journey*. Appendix II. 192.


c. Ignatius the soldier

After the death of Velázquez, Ignatius served Don Antonio Manrique de Lara, Duke of Návara and viceroy of Navarre, as a soldier seeking and gaining fame for gallantry in battle. It was during his stubborn and ego-fanciful leadership at the battle of Pamplona, between the Spanish and the French, in 1521 that he sustained a serious cannon ball injury affecting both lower limbs, the right leg shattered completely. Images of battle and warfare are common in the writings of Ignatius. Specific meditations speak of opposing forces in terms of good and evil spirits, angels of light and angels of death, victory and surrender. Being a zealot for service to the monarchy was easily translated to Kingdom imagery after his conversion. ‘Kingdom’ became the Kingdom of God [91-98].

d. Recovery, conversion and beginnings of discernment

Ignatius’ year-long precarious recuperation was significant in his spiritual conversion, for in the castle of Loyola he lay reading two life-changing books. It is generally accepted the books were *Vita Christi* (*The Life of Jesus Christ*) by Ludolph of Saxony or the Carthusian, published in Spanish at Alcala, 1502-3, and a book of the lives of the saints, *The Flower of the Saints*, in Spanish. Through his reading of the *Vita Christi* Ignatius conceived his desire to live and die in the Holy Land, especially Jerusalem. *Vita Christi* was formative for Ignatius:

> Ludolph’s influence is more noticeable in expressions, ascetic principles, and methodic details. The part of the Exercises treating the life of Christ, is especially indebted to him.

In the year of Ignatius’ convalescence (c 1521CE), he observed his feelings and responses as he read the two books. He reflected that, as in the past when he had read novels of romance and chivalry, imagining himself pursuing the pleasures of women and gallantry, he gained only short pleasure and inspiration. But when he read the

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books about the life of Christ and the Saints, imagining himself to perform actions for the glory of God, he was sustained for long periods by the joy these thoughts gave him. These movements within him were his initial awareness of the discernment of spirits, treated in detail in the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius began to understand which thoughts and actions brought him life and sustaining energy, and which drained him of life and energy.

e. Ignatius the pilgrim

In March, 1522, with his lower limb deformities scarcely healed, he began his intended pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He travelled via Montserrat so as to begin his new life with a deliberate relinquishment of his old life. He wanted to lay down his weapons to the Virgin Madonna at Montserrat and to acquire the sackcloth attire of a pilgrim. He prepared to visit the Madonna by making a general confession to Dom Jean Canon.27 His planned few days’ visit stretched to a year in which Ignatius received the exercises of Abbot García de Cisneros from Dom Chanon.28-29 Although these exercises were of a monastic practice, the ‘ways’ or exercises addressed purgation, illumination and union which are considered foundational to the Ignatian apostolic tradition in the Spiritual Exercises. ‘[H]e left his native land … while as yet lacking any capacity to discern the more subtle ways of the Spirit.’30

27 Melloni. The Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola in the Western Tradition. 3. Also paragraph 17 of the Autobiography.
28 Melloni. The Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola in the Western Tradition. 4.
29 Abbot García de Cisneros (1455-1510): “The Book of Spiritual Exercises is intended to guide the practitioner in the three “ways” of purgation, illumination, and union by means of spiritual exercises linked with Compline or Vigils, two of the hours of prayer in the monastic Liturgy of the Hours. These exercises are divided into three “weeks”, and are based on three traditional “stages” of the monastic practice of lectio divina: lectio (reading); meditatio (meditation); and oratio (prayer)”. http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts2/1500_cisner_osb/00a_start.htm
30 Melloni. The Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola in the Western Tradition. 2.
Ignatius’ first stumbling attempts to appropriate spiritual discernment are found in the story of his meeting with the Moor during this early post-conversion pilgrimage from Navarette to Monserrat. The conversation was about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Ignatius was indignant at the Moor’s appraisal that Mary was no longer a virgin after giving birth to Jesus. After parting ways with the Moor, Ignatius regretted he had not properly dealt with the situation. He considered two options: first, to go on the upper road in pursuit of the Moor and was willing to stab him in defence of the virgin-honour of Mary; second, to take the lower road, and thus show some measure of restraint as he had already done.

32 Monastery at Monserrat: known origins in 888 with the first chapel in honour of Mary. About two hundred years later, the Benedictines built a monastery there.
33 Moors are known as Muslims in contemporary society.
Even if one is not dismayed by Ignatius’ violent plan, one is struck by Ignatius’ poor discernment because he left the decision to his mule. This speculative poem suggests that although Ignatius’ deep desires were unknown to him, he unconsciously communicated them to the animal.

**Ignatius at the fork in the road**

Meekness was not the default.

Taut with instinct to bite and kick, and nostrils full of the Moor and his animal, the noble mule lurched forward as if to go up the hill towards the village where he had seen them disappear.

But the mule felt the noblemen around his girth. So he settled a little, brayed bravado at the juncture of the roads, edged towards the fresh grass along the highway.

As the reins slackened, the mule grazed. And when filled with good food, he mulled in circles at the fork in the road, leaned gently towards the rider’s hand searching for the scent of desire to guide the way he must go.

Indifference briefly stated is wanting neither one thing nor the other, except that it glorifies God. The original account of the story models a naïve level of Ignatian indifference [23]. The story models a faltering personal faith journey in which Ignatius demonstrated his flawed and potentially violent nature. The story embodies God’s presence even in struggle. It shows that discernment is intertwined with our experience, beliefs and values. At this stage in his spiritual development, Ignatius believed that God was on the lower road, and had not properly understood that God was on all roads.
f. Pilgrimage to good discernment

As Ignatius continued his pilgrimage from Montserrat to Manresa towards Jerusalem, he went via Rome and Venice.\textsuperscript{34} In 1524, he began studies in Barcelona and continued in Alcala. He moved to Salamanca then to Paris in 1528 for further study. Based in Paris during 1529 to 1535, he went on begging journeys to Flanders and England, after which he went to Spain again. In 1537, he moved to Rome and received his important vision at La Storta. As he travelled he grew in his ability to discern interior spiritual movements.

The process of good discernment is integral to the \textit{Spiritual Exercises}. Good discernment and clarity are difficult to achieve as Ignatius shows when on the one hand he says:

\begin{quote}
[He] who is giving the Exercises ought not to influence him who is receiving them. ... [Stand] in the center like a balance, leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord. [15]
\end{quote}

And on the other hand, he instructs the exercitant what to pray for:

\begin{quote}
Second Prelude. The second is to ask for what I want. It will be here to beg for a great and intense sorrow and tears for my sins. [55]
\end{quote}

I can only speculate that Ignatius considered that certain graces, being those of the Four Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises, were fundamental to the Christian life, and that these graces enabled a person to discern well.

g. Religious authority and controversy in Ignatius historical period

In the year of Ignatius’ birth, the Spanish won the Battle of Granada over the Moors (Muslims). Ignatius lived in a politically and religiously tumultuous period of

\textsuperscript{34} Tylenda. \textit{A Pilgrim’s Journey}. 86-107.
European history. As Ignatius became more influential, the religious authorities scrutinized the appropriateness of his theology and his newly formed religious order.\textsuperscript{35}

In 1538 Ignatius wrote to his Barcelona benefactress Isabel Roser a list of the oppositions and persecutions he had suffered, such as examination by the Inquisition at Alcala, Spain, over the matter of two women with whom he had acquaintance, and on another unspecified matter in which he was incarcerated for seventeen days without charge.\textsuperscript{36}

The papacy, the curia, the vicar general, and various government officials scrutinized his belief in the possibility of intimacy with God. This belief put him under the suspicion of alignment with the alumbrados (illuminati) and hence he was at risk of persecution and even death. While Ignatius claimed that God communicates directly to individual persons\textsuperscript{[15]}, he did not believe the illuminati heresy that God could be contemplated and comprehended perfectly by a perfect soul in this present life.\textsuperscript{37}

Even while under suspicion, Ignatius remained loyal to the Church hierarchy and teachings\textsuperscript{[353]} and Sacraments\textsuperscript{[354]}. The following three documented examples put him at risk:

1. Ignatius’ experience of enlightenment in Manresa in which everything seemed new to him:

   he does not think, gathering together all the helps he has had from God and all the things he has come to know ..., that he has ever attained so much as on that single occasion.\textsuperscript{39}

2. His contemplation of the Trinity:

   One day ... his understanding began to be raised up, in that he was seeing the Most Holy Trinity in the form of three keys


\textsuperscript{35} Loyola, \textit{Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings}. 150-155. Ignatius wrote the letter on 19 December, 1538.


\textsuperscript{37} Upper case S in Sacraments denotes the seven Sacraments of the Church in contrast to the sacraments of every day life in which God is present.

\textsuperscript{38} Loyola. \textit{Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings}. 27.
on a keyboard, and this with so many tears and sobs … the impression has remained with him for the whole of his life.40

3. Ignatius’ lack of teaching qualifications.

When Ignatius was questioned in Salamanca over his authority to preach about matters of faith and doctrine, he replied

We don’t preach … but speak about the things of God with certain people in an informal way, such as after a meal with some people who invite us.41

The years of informal education and his prayerful relationship with God contributed to Ignatius’ learning. This parallels my education through life and prayer. The years of writing poetry before I studied its rules enabled the freedom of language and form which study would have restricted.

My experience of ‘wonder’ as a child, was as enlightening and life-giving as any experience I have had in studying theology. An experience at Gariwerd, Victoria, in which I felt and knew my smallness in the presence of God’s almighty greatness has the quality of Ignatius’ enlightenment at Manresa. Interior knowledge came through respecting my experience. God’s will was not exterior to me, nor was it something to be discovered. I knew to some extent before doing the Spiritual Exercises that God’s will was enacted through living an authentic life.

h. Relationships with women

Ignatius had a fondness for women as Jesus did in first century Palestine. I suspect that, in his argument with the Moor, the early death of Ignatius’ mother contributed to his vehement defence of Mary, whom he might well have understood as ‘mother’ of the Church (John 19.27) and his own ‘mother’.42 Ignatius’ early chivalrous pursuit of women was eventually transformed into a deep respect and gratefulness for them. He sought the wisdom and companionship of Dona Eleonor Zapila, Isabel Roser, and

41 Ibid. Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings. 44-45.
especially Inés Pascual.\textsuperscript{43} On 6 December 1525, he wrote this compassionate and edifying letter to Inés Pascual:

\begin{quote}
... I well understand that at this moment you must be feeling weary, not only on account of the absence of that blessed servant whom it has pleased the Lord to call unto himself, but also because of the enemies and the obstacles to the service of the Lord … For the love of God Our Lord endeavor always to carry out your desires, ... temptation will have no strength whatever against you. ... the Lord does not command you to do things that may be injurious to your person.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

While the Society of Jesus has traditionally been the custodian of the Exercises, it was Ignatius’ desire for the Exercises to be a gift to the whole people of God. After a resurgence of interest in the Exercises since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965),\textsuperscript{45} the Ignatian legacy and the spirit of the Exercises has been reborn.

Currently, the popularity of the Exercises in Australia is greater among women than men especially for those seeking to receive the full Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life [19].\textsuperscript{46} The interest is multi-denominational and cross-cultural.\textsuperscript{47} Ignatian spirituality

\textsuperscript{43} DaCamara, ed. Testament and Testimony. 47.
\textsuperscript{44} Hugo Rahner. Ignatius’ Letters to Women. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1960).
\textsuperscript{46} Retreat in daily life is over 30-35 weeks. The exercitant prays each day and sees a spiritual director once a week.
\textsuperscript{47} I have guided 14 people through the full Spiritual Exercises [19 or 20]: two Quaker, one Baptist, two Anglican married women; seven Catholic women including two religious sisters and two single women; two Catholic married men. All, except one, were involved in specifically spiritual ministry. Among their particular religious histories and affiliations, was a diversity of dispositions: evangelical, fundamentalist, contemplative, sacramental, institutional and non-institutional spiritualities, which reflected their personalities, giftedness and experience. Eleven retreatants were born in Australia. Two retreatants lived overseas and visited Australia for the duration of the retreat. One spoke English as a second language. Three retreatants were under 40. The two religious women prayed the Exercises under Annotation 20 (30-35 days); All others prayed them under Annotation 19 (30-35 weeks). All fourteen exercitants were actively engaged in the community through paid and unpaid work. Their work involved Administration, Medicine, Nursing, Paramedical work, Pastoral Work, Primary Teaching and allied fields, Social Work, Counselling and Marketing. All were post-secondary educated. All sought to grow in their relationship with God. One man and one woman began the Exercises, but the process of the Exercises was not aligned with their own practice of prayer. These people would be welcome to return to pray the Exercises. One of the fourteen retreatants has become a giver of the Exercises; six more have deepened the experience through a program called ‘My Experience of the Spiritual Exercises’ which involves reflection on the participants’ personal experiences of doing the Exercises. Two have enrolled in the Arrupe Program to be formed as spiritual directors in the Ignatian tradition. This broad cross-section is consistent with religion, gender and the working life of people who have come to me for spiritual direction and have not yet prayed the Spiritual Exercises.
is affective and practical. It promotes individuation\textsuperscript{48} and is apostolic.\textsuperscript{49} I believe these attributes speak to the heart of women who continue to remain unrecognised as equally anointed by God for equal ministry.\textsuperscript{50} Ignatian spirituality invites feminine participation.

i. Story and imagination

Ignatius’ awareness of the human condition is told through his own raw story. This telling created a platform from which he grew and in turn helped others. His authenticity has contributed to a sustained interest in the \textit{Spiritual Exercises} over 450 years.

Ignatius lived in a tumultuous time when poetry and literature typically flourished. For Ignatius, stories harnessed the benefits of composing oneself imaginatively within a narrative so as to make immediate the people, places and events. My poetry invites the reader into this experience of immediacy. It uses the tool of ‘composition of place’ to help a person to notice, name, own and respond to their real story present in the imagination.\textsuperscript{51} As Keats says:

\begin{quote}
I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination. What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth - whether it existed before or not ...\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

Imagination, as in dreaming, tells the truth, but imagination requires trust and attunement to the person’s interior movements in terms of desires, emotions and thoughts, in order to find that truth.

\textsuperscript{48} ‘Individuation’ is a term referring to the process in which a person recognises, understands and integrates an authentic sense of his or her unique self.
\textsuperscript{49} ‘Apostolic’ is a reference to the ministerial work a person does as a response to a personal sense of God’s invitation.
\textsuperscript{50} In this work, the word ‘anointed’ is not reserved for religious rituals involving oil, such as the Church Sacraments, nor is it used to reinforce the distinction between those who are formally ordained for ministry and those who are not. In my view, ‘anointing’ is the recognition of a deep sense of call from God to the ministry of life God enables.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Notice, name, own and respond} are the processes which Fran Ferder gives to the spiral growth pattern in relation to human feelings. I believe this pattern can apply to thoughts and behaviour also. Fran Ferder, \textit{Words Made Flesh: Scripture, Psychology & Human Communication} (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1986).
\textsuperscript{52} John Keats. ‘Letter to Benjamin Bailey’, 22 November 1817. The quote continues ‘for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty’. http://www.john-keats.com/briefe/221117.htm
My struggle with the Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises

I struggled to accept the values of the Principle and Foundation [23] of Ignatian spirituality when given to me early in the Retreat in daily life [19]. I wondered how I could be or even should be:

indifferent to all created things, … we should not want health more than sickness, … and so with everything else; desiring and choosing only what conduces more to the end for which we are created.

As a medical radiographer, I worked from a diagnostic and therapeutic model of health. I believed that God wanted full health in everyone. It took me much of the Retreat of the Spiritual Exercises [#19] to understand that Ignatian ‘indifference’ is not ‘apathy’ but is a conscious decision to stay at balance before all things, wanting only what leads to a growing intimacy and freedom in God.

Indifference

To desire God is to relinquish shape and time for a moment to refuse concrete attraction; to be present to emptiness, to promise, to space; enough to flood the desert; to pray in absence in the dry dark air.

To desire God is to be content and thankful for the fleeting reminder

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33 Notation 23 [23]: ‘The human person is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by doing so save his or her soul. And it is for the human person that the other things on the face of the earth are created, as helps the pursuit of this end. It follows from this that the person has to use these things in so far as they help towards this end, and to free of them in so far as they stand in the way of it. To attain this, we need to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, provided the matter is subject to our free choice and there is no prohibition. Thus for our part, we should not want health more than sickness, wealth more than poverty, fame more than disgrace, a long life more than a short one – and so with everything else; desiring and choosing only what conduces more to the end for which we are created.’ Michael Ivens, Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary - a Handbook for Retreat Directors (Leominster, Herefordshire: Cromwell Press, 1998). 29.
that God is.
To desire God is to be
blindfolded and free
to not see
to not know
what is in the desire of God
for you and me
yet.

Indifference became important when I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma in 2008. After surgery, I spent three weeks of bed-rest examining my beliefs about health and sickness, and growing my awareness of Ignatius’ encouragement to find God in all things and of Julian of Norwich’s faith statement that ‘all will be well’.54 All was well whether I returned to health or not. My human potential was secondary to my love and trust in God. Similarly Ignatius’ conversion after his war injury contributed to his posture of indifference and his apostolic zeal.55

The Principle and Foundation [23] was built on Ignatius’ ‘luminous comprehension of creation’ given in the mysticism of his prayer in Manresa, Spain.56 Luminosity is a quality to which I aspire in my poetry. Luminosity to Ignatius was the quality of spiritual enlightenment in which he was able to participate in God’s infinite creativity. Ignatius encourages indifference so that one’s deeply creative desires can emerge and be enacted. ‘God’s will for us can be found in our deepest most authentic desires.’57

The poem Principle and Foundation speaks to both content and spirit of the Principle and Foundation [23] of the Spiritual Exercises.

Principle and Foundation

There is nothing in this galaxy
or a universe beyond,

54 http://mariannedorman.homestead.com/JulianofNorwich.html This site is one of many which speaks about the mediæval mystic Julian of Norwich and her contribution to mystical writing.
55 I use the word ‘apostolic’ in the broad sense of working towards building God’s universal reign.
57 Modras. Ignatian Humanism. 22.
nothing on the face of this planet
or underneath to its depth,
that cannot help each one and all
to respond to God's call to communion.

There is no hierarchy of goods
in abundance or lack.

In any moment, the heart of a person hears
what gives life, and what draws life away,
what elicits love or hate,
what creates and impassions,
what extinguishes hope,
and which decision loosens the heart
to love, to cry, to give,
to stand in awe before all that is.

The Graces of the Weeks

a. Graces

According to Juan Luis Segundo, Ignatius in the Exercises understood that ‘human existence is freedom on trial; at stake is salvation or eternal loss.’

My ontological viewpoint is that human existence is the outcome of God’s creative love in which God’s creativity yearns for relationship with the created. God’s vulnerability in self-giving love risks the effects of human freedom in responsibility or ignorance. Joseph Tetlow understands human existence as a project or part of a plan that human freedom can accomplish.

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In the Exercises, the accomplishment of humans is the ‘kingdom of God’. In this model, freedom is the ability to choose, and choice is on trial. These views are important as a background to a theology of ‘relationship with God’ or ‘grace’ which inevitably asks how God and humans are in relationship. Haight says:

The classical view of human existence and grace in Western Christianity: Human beings cannot transcend themselves and turn to God’s values without God’s initial and prevenient grace … whenever human beings transcend themselves … it is by the impulse of God as Spirit. … grace continues to sustain our freedom and action.

Graces are free and specific gifts which are the outcome of a cooperative relationship between a person and God. The grace or gift sought in First Week of the Exercises [23-90] is to know that God loves me, even as a flawed person. It is to know that I am unconditionally loved and loveable. Second Week [91-189] asks for the grace to love, know and follow Jesus Christ, which more simply said is the grace of humility. Third Week [190-217] asks for the grace to be united with Christ in suffering. This is the grace of compassion. In the Fourth Week [218-237] Ignatius asks the exercitant to pray for the grace to share with God in joy. In the Spiritual Exercises, as I have received these graces, I have come to know myself more fully, and want to respond in ministry.

b. Desire

Grace and desire are closely related. Asking for the grace to know one’s deep desires is grace in itself. Ignatius shows us that early 16th century thought valued intuitive ways of knowing more than the empirical and rational objectivity esteemed by subsequent periods of Enlightenment, Science and Industrialism. In the style of the Renaissance period, Ignatius spoke with creative clarity drawing the reader into close proximity with the reality expressed. O’Rourke-Boyle describes it in this way:

Clarity … so vivid as to render the absent present was ‘energeia’. This was a rhetorical term for the representation of reality that evoked a physical – primarily visual – scene in all its line, texture and color. It was a stylistic effect that

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60 This term is unhelpful to those whose values do not include monarchies. The term reinforces institutionalised hierarchical models of religion.
appealed to the senses and so described the scene that the listener became a spectator.\(^\text{62}\)

For Ignatius, the intention of remembering and imagining is to help the exercitant to see with the heart’s eye, to feel with the spirit’s touch and to engage all the spiritual senses. The following poem is evocative in that way.

### Song to the Author

Hunting and gathering tender buds
hidden beneath weathered leaves,
I hear whispering syllables
across my silenced self
feel breath thaw my tongue
let it move me
I smell the print of your bared soul

Do you sense my ‘yes’ to you
as your trembling sounds
drip into my mouth, fill my being
with sweet thankfulness

You draw me close
so I no longer see
You let me sink into the folds of you
to drink the nectar of unknowing

For Ignatius, God speaks directly into our desires, communicating to us as a schoolmaster teaches.\(^\text{63}\)

**c. Deceptive Desires**

Ignatius discovered that what he thought were authentic desires sometimes were not, as in the case of his scrupulous recounting of sins or his thwarted attempts to travel to Jerusalem or his beautiful and pleasurable visions which did not offer enduring joy.


\(^{63}\) DaCamara, ed. *Testament and Testimony*. Paragraph 27.4.
Ignatius was one of many who reflected fruitfully on the various movements of his life. The Buddha also said some experiences of seeming enlightenment are deceptive:

[There is a karma that has the power to cause sentient beings to be born into bad paths... and yet have such a tranquil and luminous appearance that all those who see them are gladdened.]

Ignatius’ writing style

Ignatius lacks the poise and grace and uplifting language of poetry and yet he was likely a charismatic figure who drew people to him. His writing is sparing and spacious, and like poetry, it serves to locate a person not in the experience of language but in the relational experience to which it leads. Imagery in the *Spiritual Exercises* and Ignatius’ personal writings opens rich and dense meanings for the exercitant.

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Poetry and the Exercises open ways to encounter the Mystery we name God. In that way they are sacred scripture and sacrament. In the Exercises Ignatius encourages the exercitant to pray deeply, and enter the Mystery of oneself and God:

For it is not in knowing much, but in realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul [3].

This Annotation is at the heart of personal transformation. All things loved are savoured, and savouring increases love.

Head and heart

When I know with the head,  
my heart remains in the cold.  
When I know with my heart,  
my mind is a welcomed sister.

Consistent with human need for patterns and rhythms, Ignatius outlines a rhythm to each day’s prayer. There is the ritual frame, form and practice of prayer, the dialogic rhythm in conversation with God [53] and repetitions of prayer. An example is the meditation on First Week, Day One in the text box:

- A preparatory prayer [46]
- Two Preambles: (i) which is the Composition of Place, or seeing the object to be contemplated with the ‘gaze of the imagination’ [47], and (ii) which is to ask God for what one desires [48]
- Three points: to bring the memory, understanding and will to bear on the three parts of the contemplation [50-52]
- Conversation which utilizes the imagination in speaking to Christ crucified, three questions (colloquy)[53]:
  - What have I done for Christ?
  - What am I doing for Christ
  - What ought I do for Christ?
- The Lord’s prayer - Our Father. [54]

Fig.8. Frame of prayer on First Day, First Week of the Spiritual Exercises.

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66 What is sacred is also sacrament. Sacrament offers a place of communion with what is grace-filled, wholesome and life-giving. Sacred and sacrament in this sense acknowledges that God is in all things.
A contemporary paraphrase of the three questions is in the following text box:

- What in my life has been loving?
- What am I doing to deepen my love of God and others?
- What is my apostolic desire?

Fig. 9. Paraphrase of colloquy

As well as the rhythm of prayer, Ignatius draws on 16th century poetic metaphors. He uses metonymy in which physical senses are applied to spiritual things [121, 247]. In the Exercises on scripture we find joy in knowing even in our smallness we can be companioned by a great God who says in the largest metaphor of all ‘I am who I am’ (Exodus 3.14).

A poetic legacy?

The religious apologetics characterized in ‘Of the Religion of the Utopians’ in Utopia (1516) by Thomas More is an example of literature contemporary with Ignatius. More’s views, expressed in an imaginative work, are a kaleidoscope of ways of thinking about God.

This period, at the heart of the Renaissance, heralded a fruiting of English poetry. In 1954, Yale Professor Louis Martz in his book The Poetry of Meditation, observes that seventeenth century English poets, such as the Jesuit, Robert Southwell, and Anglicans John Donne, George Herbert, and Richard Crackshaw were influenced by the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius even though the Society of Jesus was considered subversive in England at that time. Ignatian disciples had been forced underground, a place familiar to poets who by their nature and work are frequently subversive. In The Burning Babe by Robert Southwell, we find echoes of Ignatius’

67 Examples of metaphors in Ignatius’ Exercises: battle (swords of divine justice) [60] to speak about the powers of good and evil, imprisonment to speak about the power of evil over a person [47], poison to speak about sin [58], fire as Hell [66], and earthquakes to speak about what punishment ought be due to sin [60]. In keeping with traditional New Testament metaphors, he offers marriage as a simile for the covenant relationship of Christ to the Church [353]. He speaks of the Trinity of God as Three musical keys. He uses the image of the good angel’s action as ‘a drop of water which enters a sponge’ and the bad angel’s action as a drop of water as it ‘falls on [a] stone’ [335]. He refers to conscience as a ‘worm’ [69] and a person is made a ‘temple’ by God [235]. The usage of ‘woman’ for the ‘enemy’s deceits’ and ‘a licentious lover’ to show the covert way in which the ‘evil spirit’ acts [326] are personifications and politically unwise in contemporary language.

68 A renaissance is a revival of intellectual and artistic achievement and vigour.
visions, and a meditative openness to all things that is foundational in Ignatian spirituality.

As I in Hoary winter’s night stood shivering in the snow,
Surprised I was with sudden heat which made my heart to glow;
And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,
A pretty babe all burning bright did in the air appear;\(^69\)

This poem is reminiscent of Ignatius’ visions at Manresa where

He seemed to see something white, from which some rays were coming, and God made light from this. [and later] the form that appeared to him was like a white body, neither very large nor very small … He saw it at Manresa many times. If he should say twenty to forty, he would not dare judge it a lie.\(^70\)

In 1633, George Herbert wrote the poem, *Discipline*, in which he speaks of an image of God who has the capacity to smite and love. The poem implores the God of mercy, and in the second half, the poet has the tone of utter abandonment to God,

Throw away thy rod,
Throw away thy wrath:
O my God,
Take the gentle path.

For my heart’s desire
Unto thine is bent:
I aspire
To a full consent.

... 
Though I fail, I weep:
Though I halt in pace,
Yet I creep
To the throne of Grace ... \(^71\)

\(^70\) DaCamara, ed. 42.
\(^71\) George Herbert. “Discipline”. 1633. Allison et al. 266.
The second part of the poem has strong connection with the Ignatian pivotal prayer

*Take Lord Receive* (*Suscipe*) [234]:

Take, Lord, and receive all
my liberty, my memory, my intellect,
and all my will –
all that I have or possess.
Thou gavest it to me:
to Thee, Lord, I return it!
All is thine;
dispose of it according to thy will.
Give me thy love and grace,
for this is enough for me.\(^{72}\)

**Religious Scruples**

In primary school on Fridays, we ran through a list of possible sins offending the Ten Commandments given to Moses three thousand years ago. This examination of conscience is Ignatian although I didn't know it at the time. I thought I had sinned against nearly every commandment. I did not want to have a ‘black soul’ like the child in the picture book which formed my childhood conscience. When I went to the sacrament of Confession I wondered if I had made it well enough, and whether I ought to go back and make my Confession again.

The poem is part of the transformation of shame which accompanied me to adulthood.

**Holier than Thou**

Mum gave me a special book
for my First Communion.
She said it wasn't really mine.
It belonged to all the family
because it cost a pound.

I had to ask to read it.

\(^{72}\) Fleming. *Draw Me into Your Friendship*. 176.
Wait here, she said
and she went somewhere.

Then she gave it to me.

I held it as if it were more sacred than my hands
marvelling at the mystery of the pop-up saints
and the grapes and wheat which became Jesus
just by pulling the strings.

I learned that the Pope and Jesus
were on the same level
at the top of the stairs.
Cardinals were next, then
Bishops and
Priests.
Monks and nuns were on a par with families.
Boys who had black souls
couldn’t go to communion.

Girls didn’t pop up at all.

I fingered the fold-open coat
and the black soul inside
until the coat was limp and
I felt shame
for soiling the book.
The book having the Imprimatur of Polycarpus, Ep. Macaonensis, Macai, 24.10.1955, portrays 1950s Catholic theology of sin. Ignatius was also held captive to a theology of sin which caused him to be self-deprecat ing and repetitive in asking God for forgiveness. This stopped him from glorifying God in the way he desired.

Ignatius’ perfectionism in the form of scruples continued to plague him in Manresa during the early period following his conversion. Even confession did not remove his obsessive shame. He began self-flagellation to rid himself of self-defeating thought patterns. Ignatius was deceived into believing that this practice was

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73 M Goerezza, Catechetical Scenes: The Blessed Eucharist (Hong Kong: Catechetical Centre "Peter Ricaldone", 1955), 9.
75 Bruce Chilton. Mary Magdalene: A Biography. (New York: Doubleday, 2005), chapter 1, “Possessed” especially page 8. The discipline of self-flagellation was usually intended to tame vanity and the sexual appetites and was common in Medieval Christianity. Self-abasement and shaming was understood as a cure for these sins. Ignatius’ other ascetic practices included compromised hygiene, long unkempt hair and fingernails, and fasting.
necessary to transform him. Contemporary ascetic practices such as fasting, are intended to free rather than oppress a person.

It is not surprising that Ignatius brought sin and disorder into focus in Week One of the Exercises. In his autobiography, Ignatius reveals an institutional stage of faith:

Sometimes he thought it would cure him if his confessor ordered him in the name of Jesus Christ not to confess anything of the past; … but he did not dare say this to his confessor.76

In terms of James Fowler’s faith stages, this represents level two or three of a six-stage developmental faith journey.

The person best described by Stage 3 has deeply felt beliefs and values, acts on them, and defends them. But typically, he or she grounds such beliefs and values on the authority of a significant other or a valued group consensus, whose authority is taken to be self-evidently valid.77

In the cave at Manresa where he lived for 11 months:

[h]e prayed and meditated seven hours a day. He experienced doubts, illuminations, visions, spiritual joys, scruples, temptations, inner battles, even struggling against a mad impulse to kill himself. He recorded his experiences in journals.78

a. Emerging from scruples

Eventually at Manresa Ignatius was ordered by a confessor to break his perilous fast. Finally he resolved not to confess anything from his past life again.79 He had reached a new faith stage along with the ability to judge a diversity of spirits.

During those 11 months of prayer and meditation … he learned that he needed to balance his ascetic practices with a wise consideration of his well-being. He would later say that Jesuits needed no fixed hours for prayer … because any time was appropriate for prayer.80

76 DaCamara, ed. ibid. Paragraph 22.7 and 8.
79 DaCamara, ed. ibid. Paragraph 25.
80 Morgan Zo-Callahan and Ken Ireland. “What inspires us”.
The transformation from religious scrupulosity to a healthy sense of guilt is synchronous with a growing healthy sense of self. When authority begins to be derived from internal processes, such as when Ignatius speaks of discernment as awareness of authentic desires, he has engaged Stage Four faith. The following poem speaks to the possibility of challenging outgrown frames of meaning.

Holy Doubt

It sounds easy to be free in making decisions
but when the voice of deception hooks into the soul
with claws wrapped right around the mind,
there is no movement. Authority seems internal,
entrenched. It takes a good spirit
to doubt what has always been.

Ignatius learned how not to make mistakes by making many. Out of Ignatius’ suffering and scruples, his often tortured introspection and fruitful reflection,

there emerged in Inigo de Loyola that balance of spirit and matter, of mind and body, of mystical contemplation and pragmatic action that has ever since been recognized as typically and specifically "Ignatian," as distinct from the spirituality of, say, St. Benedict or St. Dominic or St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila.

Ignatius encourages ‘no obstacle seems to be so formidable that it cannot be faced and overcome with God’s grace’. A life meaningful in the Kingdom for Ignatius meant expanding his vision to others. He was well-educated, and spiritually formed for ministry, and able to make a serious commitment to companionship with Jesus. The Moor or Less-travelled Road, speaks of the two roads of choice: the road on which Ignatius might have stabbed the Moor or the road which led to freedom for him.

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81 Fowler and Keen. Life Maps. 72.
83 “Iñigo De Loyola,” in The Society of Jesus(undated). 156.
84 Fleming. Draw Me into Your Friendship. 249.
The Spiritual Exercises

The Moor or Less-travelled road

The less travelled road

is a donkey road, the frisky risky road,
the fool's road, the no-rules road.

It is a stony road, a humble fumble road,
the thumb-a-ride, come aside road.

It is a lonely road, the only road,
the beyond-the-yellow-brick-road road.

It is the light road, the fly-a-kite road,
the empty purse, the unrehearsed road,

the resisted road, the blistered road,
Bartimaeus, Emmaus road

It is the blind road, the free-from-bind road,
the trust-grow road, the must-go road.

the discerned road, the yearned road
It is the God within and Guide beside road.
Your road, the Moorless more road,
It is the less travelled road.

Renaissance and contemporary worlds

The spirituality and world-view of Ignatius was consistent with that of Europe.

Modras in Ignatian Humanism makes the point:

the spirituality that began with Ignatius Loyola and the founding of the Society of Jesus was and remains deeply imbued with distinctive features it absorbed from the Renaissance humanism of the day.85

85 Modras. Ignatian Humanism. xvi.
While the contemporary technological world was yet to be dreamt, the 16\textsuperscript{th} century and the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries had characteristics in common.

The mind and outlook of Loyola’s world was as suddenly and as abruptly and as deeply swept out of its thousand-year-old medieval habitat as our world has been swept out of its nineteenth-century, colonial state into the post-World War II, atomic and electronic age. The floodgates of newness then were the high Renaissance, the discovery of the Americas, the onslaught of the Protestant revolt, the rise of capitalism, the birth of our Western scientific technology.\textsuperscript{86}

Rejection of traditional religious beliefs, and the search for meaningful ways to be in relationship with Mystery, the world and each other, were and are significant for both historic periods. Although Ignatius would not have accepted that people could live grace-filled lives outside the Christian tradition, his spirituality which arguably emerges from a culture of humanism, speaks to our contemporary humanistic culture.\textsuperscript{87}

Opening our eyes to new horizons of grace, it allows us to extend our hands to people we once dismissed as outsiders and discover in them, perhaps to our wonderment, kindred spirits.\textsuperscript{88}

Just as poetry looks both in and out on the horizon, the \textit{Spiritual Exercises} are not only Catholic but universal as well. The \textit{Spiritual Exercises} speak to a secular culture that wants freedom, leadership and wisdom.

\textbf{Kin}

I show you my wounds.

I see yours.

They have the same character.

They weep inside.

\textsuperscript{86} “Iñigo De Loyola.” 147.

\textsuperscript{87} Thomas W Clark. “Humanism and Postmodernism: A Reconciliation” \textit{Humanist} 1993, V53, 1. 18-23. http://www.naturalism.org/Humanism.htm ‘Our lives, in order to be worthwhile, and our society, in order to be humane, need not be grounded in the supernatural: we can be good without God.’ This comment is consistent with the claim of Pomponio Algerio which precipitated his being burned to death in oil by the Inquisition. As well as a humanist, he would have been described as an atheist, had he lived in our contemporary period. In Ignatius’ historical period, atheism avowal was unthinkable. Algerio died vowing Protestantism: Robert Ignatius Letellier, "Old and New Covenants: Historical and Theological Contexts in Scribe's and Halevy's La Juive," (2008). http://www.akademie-rs.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf_archive/czerny/2008OperntagungLaJuiveVortragLetellier.pdf. 6.

\textsuperscript{88} Modras. \textit{Ignatian Humanism}. 306.
Parallel stories

As I reflect on my writing, I am surprised at the similarity of my ‘gospel’ to Ignatius’ own. To some extent, my story parallels that of Ignatius: we have shared physical and spiritual crises. We have come to know God as a loving companion and liberator of disabling patterns of thought and behaviour. We have redirected our energies into fruitful and free action for the love of God.

The journey of the Spiritual Exercises was instrumental in increasing my personal depth of communion with God, and in the progression of my work as a poet. The vocation of spiritual director and giver of the Exercises came to life in me during the Retreat in daily life experience of the Spiritual Exercises. It was then that I decided to be formed in the Arrupe Program.  

The authority of life

I live at the junction of orthodoxy, heresy and prophecy as poets often do. My historical connection with institutional religion is unmistakable, but my desire to edge into the liminal space is strong. God is forming a new spirituality, and I do not know what it will look like, but I am sure that it will be characterized by passion, generosity, hospitality, mutuality and freedom. Ignatius was a layperson who inspired the foundation of a new religious order. The new order of today is marked by the same passion and desire for freedom and love which propelled Ignatius. My hope is alive when I think that a new order will resist the limitations of being named and defined too rigorously. It will be the outcome of a groundswell of hope.

Contemporary Australia is experiencing a comparatively peaceful time of broad scholarship, individual and social awareness, and expanded cosmologies. Many traditional spiritualities hunger for creative and contemporary ways to engage and communicate with people. Ignatian spirituality is both active and contemplative. It

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makes sense that people would seek to develop their interior lives to balance their rich exterior lives. I resonate with Yeats when he says:

> The journey into the inner self is not just the important one, it is the only one. We need to listen to the sound beyond the silence.⁹⁰

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that Ignatius developed the Spiritual Exercises and co-founded the Society of Jesus as a result of an ongoing conversion experience in relationship with God. Ignatius was visionary, active and contemplative, a passionate crusader, a teacher and giver of the Spiritual Exercises. All these things ensued from God to enlarge Ignatius’ dynamic graced disposition to God. His commitment to following Jesus as his Lord and Christ inspired him to be like the Christ he revered. In a similar way as Ignatius became the person he truly was, through the Spiritual Exercises, I became a giver of the Exercises and the poet I truly am.

This chapter has described the frame of the Exercises, the power of the imagination and desire within the prayer of the Exercises as vehicles of encountering and receiving God’s grace.

The chapter has related the story of Ignatius, showing that his weaknesses were distortions of his strengths. The story situates him in the volatile religious world of Spain in the sixteenth century. His passion for military success prior to his conversion was translated into his passion for the Kingdom of God.

Ignatius enjoyed the discovery that God loved him personally and desired freedom for him. Ignatius experienced this love relationship as a partnership in building the Kingdom of God. I experience my relationship with God as one of empowerment to enable my life in God to be fruitful.

The profound grace I received from God in praying the Spiritual Exercises could not be for me alone. It opened my poetry and my potential to become a giver of the Exercises and a spiritual director in the Ignatian tradition.

Must I write?

Rilke says *must you write?*

I am at balance
waiting for the words to come
or not.

My experience of giving the Spiritual Exercises reflects the power of having prayed them. In many ways, I continue to ‘receive the Exercises’ as my exercitants share their narratives which challenge me to grow further and own my changing personal gospel.

In terms of the broad thesis statements, this chapter has shown that

- Poetry as an art is a language of spiritual experience. It enabled me to speak about the Exercises in a way which did not reduce or demean the largeness of the experience.
- Writing poetry is my personal vocation. It is this because I love it and others find it meaningful.
- Writing poetry mobilized the graces of the Spiritual Exercises. Through the poetry, the grace of encountering God was deepened and my images of God were challenged and became more authentic.

The poem *Giving the Spiritual Exercises* previously examined, states poetically the way my interaction with Ignatius and the Exercises has nurtured my encounter with the living God towards apostolic effectiveness. The poem itself has opened a way for me to express the profound nature of the journey I have had through the Spiritual Exercises.

*Giving the Spiritual Exercises*

Let there be nothing
between pen and point;
nothing between you and God.
Let the poetry of prayer open
your heart right down the sternum.
Let God have God's way with you.
Let God be *the you* God wants to be.

If I am to have one love, one desire
it is to feel all there is,
and to witness your sense of yourself
as a firework fountain bursting
the night sky.
Methodology: Poetic Autoethnography

The union of head and heart –

she is art; the poem.

Introduction

This methodological chapter links poetry, prayer and grace in the context of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius. It shows that the processes and content of Ignatian spirituality support autoethnography, the methodology of the present work.

In this chapter on method and methodology, I will explain and illustrate

- Autoethnography
- The relationship of autoethnography to spiritual direction
- Poetic autoethnography
- Autoethnography, the Spiritual Exercises and spiritual direction
- Research influences
- Axiology
- Epistemology
- Voices in the writing
- Growing edges in the writer and research

Autoethnography

a. Method

This thesis including the present methodological chapter will use poetry and prose as the dynamic content of the study. The research includes written journal material and reflection on the process at every point in the research. I dialogue with relevant writers, and include visual art and audio elements, in so far as they clarify and further
the research. In order to show that sound, cadence and word contribute to meaning and remembering, just as it did in the ancient oral traditions, I have included audio recordings of poetry on two compact discs.

**Word Storeys**

multiple voices,
choirs of meaning,
visible and invisible,
audible or unutterable,
echo deeply.

I have adopted the practice of ‘re-search’ that April Vannini used in her work interviewing Coreen Gladue, a Cree/Métis woman resident of British Columbia, Canada.¹ Re-search in this instance was an examination of data from many perspectives, expressing the findings in multiple ways.

The language in this thesis is intended to be invitational and inclusive, rather than technical and exclusive. My privileged experience, especially my education and travel within various cultures, confronts socio-cultural difference as challenge and grace. I will examine my presuppositions about what is important to write and what might enhance communication.

Writing poetry is a method of inquiry inviting increased personal understanding and integration. While not all poets engage an organic writing process, I enjoy allowing form and content to emerge, engaging with the material in redrafting and editing towards an ultimately readable poem, inviting the reader into a personal, shared and often-universal experience. An important aspect to the present work is the use of poetry as a tool of self-awareness, self-growth and professional self-supervision.

b. Characteristics

While ‘autoethnography’ is not included in commonly-used dictionaries, ethnography is described in the Collins dictionary as ‘the scientific description of peoples and

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¹ April Vannini and Coreen Gladue, "Moccasin on One Foot, High Heel on the Other: Life Stories reflections of Coreen Gladue," *Qualitative Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (2009).
² *The New Oxford Dictionary of English.* Edited by Judy Pearsall. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.) The dictionaries I consulted were the Macquarie, Merriam-Webster and Collins, none of which included ‘autoethnography’
cultures with their customs, habits and mutual differences. The etymological dictionary adds further insight: *auto* (Latin) self, same; *ethnos* (Greek) culture, people, nation or class; *graphis* (Latin) story, the study of something written.

Autoethnography is an emergent method of narrative inquiry within qualitative research methodologies. The ‘self’ that is researched is also the researcher. I, as autoethnographer, enter the research with a disposition of open-ness and generosity. The research is characterized by multi-levels of writing and reflecting. The substantive experience and the written record of that experience form the raw data. It is therefore a rigorous methodology which unleashes impediments and blocks to truthful self-revelation and self-disclosure such that the researcher ‘allow[s] [herself] to emerge in the process and the product.’

Autoethnography respects individual reflexivity, interiority, spontaneity and story, and speaks from and to persons in cultures. Autoethnography parallels the pattern of epistemological growth operative in Ignatian prayer, including discernment and spiritual direction which is a reflective and participative, and is understood as companioning in the presence of God. Autoethnography invites an epistemology which I understand as *sentir* (Spanish) which speaks of heart-felt knowing, a meeting of head and heart in integrated knowing. The process of the inquiry invites and assists ongoing personal formation.

I am informed by various writers including Ellis and Bochner, pioneers in this field of qualitative research. Gillies Ambler’s work, *Transcending Grief* is an example of autoethnography connecting the fields of spirituality and social science.

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4 Ignatius outlines an important disposition for the prayer in the Spiritual Exercises in [5]: ‘to enter them with great courage and generosity towards [the] Creator and Lord, offering Him all his will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may make use of his person and of all he has according to his most holy will.’


c. Guiding principles

For this work to be relevant, it requires ‘a careful set of guiding principles and a willingness to engage in constant reflection at all stages of data collection and analysis’.

The guiding principles for this work, built on the presupposition that I am willing to engage in reflection at all stages of data collection and analysis, are:

1. reflections in the data revisit any event in my life which has emerged from my engagement with the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius and Ignatian spirituality in general
2. writing illustrates the reception of the specific graces of the Four Weeks of the Exercises, whether in the context of the Exercises or in other contexts;
3. experience and writing have been personally transformative
4. writing has cultural relevance
5. writing crosses the boundary of Ignatian spirituality into broader spirituality cultures.

10 Grace describes the gift of being in relationship with God, the source of all life. Graces refer to the awareness of specific experiences which enhance life and have fruitful potential. Such graces are intangible as, for example, joy, peace, love; or tangible in, for example, talents such as public speaking, hospitality and poetry writing.
11 Spirituality cultures’ are those commonly amongst the monastic spiritualities, contemplative spiritualities and more secular spiritualities such as nature spiritualities. I suggest that the writing in this work might also find a common ground between value systems in spiritual traditions as well as in secular societies. By ‘spiritual’, I am generally referring in the broadest sense to people who have an openness to the unknown mystery of life, and in the narrowest sense to those who are open and connected to the source of life through a particular tradition such as the Ignatian tradition.
d. Vulnerability of autoethnographer

Autoethnography is a methodology of personal risk which takes the autoethnographer into unanticipated and challenging experiences. The autoethnographer asks the same questions of herself as she does of any writer. As she ‘reads’ her story, the reading is filtered through life experience as all writing is. Autoethnography takes this subjectivity to another level where I intentionally trust the process in order to learn more about myself and the culture in which I participate. In the process of autoethnography, I am participating in a culture which changes in part because my research changes me.

As both researcher and researched, I am vulnerable as a ‘researched’ person because I know more about the subject than other researchers and because I recognise the importance of self-knowledge and self-disclosure to the research. Self-care is warranted. Intrinsic to autoethnography is the researcher’s high value invested in authenticity. The possibility of suppression with its invasive potential is minimized because of this authenticity factor.

e. Strengths of autoethnography

The strengths of autoethnography include the researcher’s intimate knowledge of the details of the research which enables a depth of research not possible through any other means. Autoethnography understands self-as-subject as an asset – looking at something from the inside and offering a perspective on that view. I have a high level of trust in ‘my researcher’, and am able to choose what is and what is not important to disclose.

As a spiritual director, poet and person who has prayed and given the Spiritual Exercises, I am in a position to explore the interconnection of emerging issues at a deeper level than an ‘objective’ researcher. It is of course impossible for anyone to be truly objective in relation to any topic. Avi Rose quoted in Vannini and Gladue speaks this idea poetically: ‘I like being soloist and accompanist. I think it adds melodic harmony to the music of human experience inquiry.’

12 Vannini and Gladue. “Moccasin on One Foot.” 176.
Using personal narrative as the research focus is a strength in so far as story has always been an epistemological vehicle. Knowledge gained through engaging with Ignatian spirituality emerges from a person’s experience of life, reflection on it and subsequent decision-making. It is an integrated approach to learning.

Transparency or self-disclosure is linked with personal growth and self-acceptance. When I am transparent in what I think, believe and feel, I open myself to a deeper self-acceptance. Through self-disclosure I make connections with others who participate in similar ways in the human story.

f. Poetic autoethnography

As poetic autoethnographer, I intentionally research and write my thoughts and feelings. My journal, often written in raw poetry, is a container which supports the management and processing of those thoughts and feelings. McCormack suggests that a journal is a holding space in which to identify emergent themes which are personally and culturally relevant.13

The practice of ethnographical poetics can be understood as the process of mapping the field of action in which the self becomes aware, uniquely or differently, of its own existence …

One definition of poetic authoethnography is:

Autoethnographic poetry is an investigation into the nature of self or ego as a phenomenon that arises in the interactions between the one and the many, the body and the polis, the moment of apprehension formed by the in-swirling of cosmic and historical forces. These fault lines, fractures really, score the surface of the text.14

God’s morning light, redrafted from my raw journal poetry, speaks of vulnerability opening a way for personal insight. The poem refers to Mary who said ‘yes’ to becoming the child-mother of Jesus.

God’s morning light
fractures a rainbow
on the waters

Her arms a cave
surround her new-born wonder
holding as if she knows
what fragile is

as if she feels the longing
of his amniotic dreaming

She sees the light,
the opal fissures of ‘yes’

He raises her

face to face
child to child
to touch all beatitude
all favour

This poem represents a result of the interaction of the ‘one’ and the ‘many’. It is representative of both because I speak from and to the culture of which I am a part.

Poetry is distilled literature. It is also imaginative, analogical, metaphorical, mythical, symbolic and mystical. The poetry in this work is inclusive of anyone with an interest in spirituality. Imaginative gospel contemplation presented in poetry offers a window to Christian frameworks without judgment on anyone who chooses another framework. It shows the ongoing empowering and freeing effect which Ignatian spirituality through the Spiritual Exercises has given to me and my ministry in poetry, spiritual direction and formation of spiritual directors.

15 Imaginative gospel contemplation is prayer whereby a person contemplates a scriptural passage and enters the scene imaginatively noticing who is present, what is said and so forth. I will explain this further in Chapter Seven.
Threshold

Forever on the threshold
excited by what might be or not
My imagination enters the bud
Flames of green enclose
my velvet heart
I name the not-yet colour

surprised when I see
the first fragile showings
I dialogue with all these
vulnerable parts of me
and the you I own so truly
they will never die

I am forever
on the threshold

Words and the experiences that give rise to the words are the content of this thesis. Before writing I am inspired by a new awareness, an experience of felt-energy and delight. It is the moment of knowing that Saint Ignatius of Loyola names *sentir*. All human awareness continues to be engaged in the growth and expansion as part of a universe engaged in that same ongoing growth. Poetry which emerges from *sentir* participates in this expansion.

Knowledge, always interpreted, builds upon knowledge as we engage in a labyrinth of what Ferder identifies as noticing, naming, owning and responding. This is illustrated in the poem *Threshold*.16

A poetic disposition to life and prayer in the Spiritual Exercises opens a person to receive and embody graces, especially those for which Ignatius asks a person to pray. In the same way, I have reflected on my life and found that prayer in poetry has

progressed my journey towards freedom and wholeness. I believe this research as a poetic autoethnography will speak to my contemporaries in Ignatian spirituality.

As a poet, I am in the position to do this research from a number of perspectives, none of which compromise the spiritual direction relationship. I do not use my directees as ‘researched’, nor do I intentionally scrutinize them to gain the desired research outcome. I do not erect barriers or compromise the outcomes of spiritual direction. Poetry on the contrary removes barriers, making its content transparent and mutual. Poetry is a confidential way of speaking ‘story’. It opens a window on shared humanity without being thematic or theoretical.

**Autoethnography, the Spiritual Exercises and spiritual direction**

a. **Ignatius and autoethnography**

This autoethnography is faithful to the Ignatian participative paradigm present in his life and writings. *The Spiritual Exercises* is the fruit of Ignatius’ reflection on his life story and the way in which he understood God’s presence in his life, vocation and all things. Ignatius faced vulnerably his fears and joys, graces and disgraces. He willingly shared himself with others for the sake of what he interpreted as God’s desires. My vocation also finds expression in the current work. The journey as Ignatius intended it, was to be shared with a companion, a spiritual director. Poetry was also a companion to me as I journeyed with my spiritual director through the Spiritual Exercises. This poetry and subsequent poetry is data and process for this research.

‘Autobiography’ is critical to the process of autoethnography. We glean much about Ignatius from his autobiography.\(^1\) It speaks of the substantive experience and offers some reflection on it. The *Spiritual Exercises* are the ‘fruit’ of his life experience. Ignatius wrote the Exercises from and for the religious culture in which his insights had shared meaning. He engaged the counsel of wise figures and peers, and from these cultural groups, he developed the systematic and dynamic Spiritual Exercises Retreat to offer others. My methodology is in parallel to Ignatius’ work.

\(^1\) Joseph N Tylenda, *A Pilgrim’s Journey: The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola* Revised ed. (Ignatius Press, 2001). This work appears to be biography, but the grammatical third person is Ignatius’ own device of speaking about himself.
b. Spiritual direction

The model of spiritual direction helpful in giving and receiving the Spiritual Exercises is one of careful listening and discernment [15]. During my experience of the Exercises, I was encouraged to bring my imagination to bear on chosen biblical texts and engage freely in encountering Jesus and the various characters in those texts. It was suggested that, at the end of each prayer time, I write in my journal what I noticed about my prayer; when I felt drawn to God, and when I felt distant from God. I noticed that I related with God in similar ways to significant others in my life. This awareness set a platform on which I could embrace, challenge and evaluate aspects of my relationships and beliefs underpinning my responses and behaviors. This model of prayer and spiritual direction led to increased love, joy and freedom.

It seems more than possible to me that if I follow a methodology in which I share my story, much as an exercitant might share with her retreat-giver, and I leave a space open for my story to be heard much as a retreat-giver would do, then a reader’s story becomes active in the reading of my story. In this way, a person is invited into the process of spiritual discernment, the vital component of the Exercises and spiritual direction. The methodology for the present work will reflect this reality, and hence the thesis will read as a discerning journey. It is therefore apparent to me that the research methodology parallels the spiritual direction process.

Spiritual direction is a place of self-discovery and self-disclosure. History has the practice beginning in fourth century Egypt, Palestine and Syria when abbas and ammas guided people searching for God in their hearts. In contemporary practice, Ignatian spiritual direction is an encounter between two people, sometimes known as a director and a directee, with the mutual purpose of exploring, interpreting and understanding the directee’s religious experience, and with a view to an active response in the directee’s life. Exploring, interpreting and understanding are part of any research methodology, but it is the personal and immediate nature of spiritual direction which renders it compatible with autoethnography. The content of the spiritual direction communication is often, but not always, religious language.
Holland describes religious language as ‘imaginative, analogical, mystical, metaphorical, mythical, symbolic and poetic.’

I noticed that as I engaged with Ignatian spirituality there were significant parallels between my experience and that of others in the same tradition. This research methodology is consistent with that of Ignatius as he developed spiritual exercises. Ignatius reflected on his life and found that particular prayer exercises freed him to do the work which progressed his personal journey to wholeness. He wrote *The Spiritual Exercises* and found that his work was relevant to his contemporary culture.

**Research influences**

a. My relationship with writing and its impact on the research setting

As a participant-researcher, I identify with the poem in terms of its process and product. In this work, I move between participant and researcher, and between the multiple levels of consciousness, and communicate to the reader my awareness of influences which affect the progress of the work.

Already I find that, in concrete ways, the research has impacted the research setting—the Centre in which I minister as a spiritual director. Through professional development presentations and supervision, spiritual directors and student-spiritual directors are more aware of the ways in which poetry and autoethnography can help a person explore liminality, become more aware and make life-giving decisions.

At times, poetic autoethnography communicates at a deeper level than explanation or elucidation, in much the same way as Noel Rowe shows in his article ‘Poetry, Theology and Emptiness.’ He has this to say about his poetic methodology:

> You will have noticed that I am using the terms ‘nothingness’ and ‘emptiness’ without saying exactly what I mean by them. That is partly because I want to convey a poetic rather than a philosophy, and would rather not land myself in discussion

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about whether I am talking nihilism, atheism or atheology. I want to abide in the realm of metaphor, using the terms to generate suggestions, associations, ambiguities, contradictions.20

Metaphor in poetry is faithful to the largesse of life. A post-modern stance, as expressed by Richardson doubts:

that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as ‘right’ or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge.21

Beyond such a stance, I suggest that poetry situates itself as a bird’s eye to these aforementioned forms of knowledge. It looks upon these representations of knowing, upward and outward to a greater knowing restricted only by intelligence and human desire. Poetry, autoethnography and prayer do not dismiss ‘traditional ways of knowing but open space to … create new ones’.22 Bouras value poems in this way:

A good poem lingers in the mind, and the best ones mark the soul and memory indelibly. But as well as words, poems provide gaps, spaces, and silences in an increasingly complicated and cacophonous world. Poems invite meditation and contemplation, while fusing the sensual with the spiritual, ... they are an integral part of civilization.23

b. Personal Narrative

There are various foundations and frames of reference in my world of relationships from which I come to know things. My reflective engagement in poetry is record and source of a lifetime as a woman Roman Catholic in Australia.

I attended Catholic schools in Melbourne. I studied at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) at night over four years to become a Medical Imaging Technologist. I did a Bachelor of Theology in 1981-1987. In 1988, I completed a Graduate Diploma of Education (Sec) at the Institute of Catholic Education, (now

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Australian Catholic University). I studied for a Master of Theology in 1999-2000. My education and formation in theology, pastoral work, spiritual direction and other educational and ministerial disciplines, have maintained my connection to institutional religion. My life has been enriched by a growing sense of spirituality in all things.

c. Work and vocational history

My parents were working-class. I worked in a milk bar on Sunday mornings until I finished secondary school and began employment as a trainee radiographer in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{24, 25} In 1989-91, I taught Religious Education and Australian Studies at a Catholic girls’ college in Melbourne. I left teaching when our children were studying for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). I returned to Medical Imaging when my husband lost his main source of income six months later. I have been colleague and servant to people of all socio-economic groups and religions, in public and private hospitals and practices throughout Melbourne. Currently I offer spiritual direction formation. I am a giver of the Spiritual Exercises and spiritual director. This work in Ignatian spirituality has assisted me to name my primary vocation as poet. This is the authentic person I am in spiritual direction. I have valued and continue to value all my roles and relationships. They are meaningful and generative.

\textsuperscript{24} Medical Imaging Technologists (MITs) is more descriptive of the broad range of modalities in which MITs engage at the present time. The earlier term was ‘radiographer’.

\textsuperscript{25} A ‘milk bar’ was often on a corner and a gathering place for youth. It was the 1960s version of contemporary 7-eleven stores.
Poetic Autoethnography

Luckily for the driver,
who trail-blazes,
and dreams
of a GPS,
the auto is self-driven.

Luckily for the Australian
giver of Spiritual Exercises
Doncaster neighbour
Roman Catholic
Ignatian woman
baby boomer
coffee lover
mother
friend
sister
wife
poet
©
orphanteacher
researcher
radiographer
team member
spiritual director
Myers-Briggs type  ????
the ethno is self-evident

luckily for the researcher
who muses and reflects
paints word-pictures
graphically
the graphis is written
d. Religio-cultural frame

In the last thirty years, I have been enriched by connections to various Christian denominations through prayer and bible study groups including evangelical Baptist community for two years in the 1980s. I have always been more embedded in Catholicism than any other denomination.

As a child, I prayed the novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour until the pages of the booklet were thin and frail.26 My parents prayed the rosary, and our family went to regular Sunday mass and Friday night novena. My mother and father were Anglo-Celtic Roman Catholics although my maternal grandfather was Anglican and born in England. A person of faith, my mother was critical of double standards in institutional religion and felt compelled to confront religious authorities with a view to justice. My father acquiesced although he agreed with my mother.

My affiliation to organized religion has been a source of grace and distress throughout my life. Religion has influenced my decision-making in marriage and family, friends and interests. I find institutionalized patriarchy in the Catholic Church to be alienating. The insistence of the ‘mother’ Church to exclude women and men from free vocational decisions can only be one of a controlling ‘parent’. The Church struggles wounded, while it continues to self-mutilate. It perpetuates discrimination.

I have journeyed through various faith stages that correspond to Fowler’s six-stage framework, and I enjoy increasing interior freedom.27

e. Marriage and family

Marriage since 1971 and parenting since 1975 have contributed positively to my personal formation. My husband runs an accountancy practice from home. We have two adult children meaningfully employed.

26 Novena refers to nine consecutive prayer experiences. They could be for example, nine Saturday prayers or nine consecutive days of prayer.

27 ‘Interior freedom’ is characteristic of a post-conventional stage of moral development according to Sam Keen, in Life Maps and faith Stage Four or beyond, according to James Fowler, Keen’s co-author. James Fowler and Sam Keen, Life Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith, ed. Jerome Berryman (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1978; reprint, Fourth).
My parents were married for 49 years before my mother died in 1990 from cancer. My father died in 2000 after twenty years of multiple strokes. I have no known relatives surviving from my parents’ generation. I stay in touch with my two sisters.

f. Economic frame

I have lived in various suburbs of Melbourne, Australia all of my life except six months in Lae, Papua New Guinea in 1974-75 after the declaration of self-government and before independence from Australia. We have travelled throughout Australia, the United States of America, New Zealand, Ireland, the United Kingdom, parts of Europe, Asia and the Pacific.

I identify with a middle socio-economic stratum of people in Australia. I have enjoyed a variety of hobbies and recreational activities. I have worked part-time and full-time in either medical imaging or secondary teaching and I have paid for my education and formation.

g. Significant memories

Significant life experiences which have affected my response to the world are the graces and grief of growing up in fear of my unpredictable father, and respectful of my restrained and dutiful mother. I was the youngest of three daughters. By age nine, I had moved house six times and school five times. I was the youngest in my class from preparatory to tertiary. Being younger than others in nearly everything I have done has both encouraged and undermined my personal development.

h. Disenfranchised grief

Non-finite or disenfranchised grief is:

the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publically mourned or socially supported.28

Among many examples of disenfranchised grief, Dianne McKissock includes infertility.29 My husband and I have lived with unwelcomed infertility and have undergone unsuccessful fertility treatments. We adopted our children as babies.

Adoption addressed issues of childlessness, but not infertility. Poetry in this thesis wrestles with these issues. Both our adult-children have accessed identifying information about their origins. Our daughter has met her biological family on many occasions. Her birth parents are married to each other, have two children, and live in Melbourne. Our son has not met his biological family, although I have met his maternal grandparents and communicated with his ‘first mother’.30

My awareness of the impact of non-finite grief has deepened throughout this research period. Non-finite grief in my childhood related to my father’s angry and unavoidable presence. Later it related to infertility, cancer and discrimination. I have felt and expressed powerlessness and anger, but these emotions are not tools of change against the Catholic Church’s impenetrable stance.

i. Health

My significant health history includes glandular fever at eight years old, spinal disorders over decades, burnout at age 30, and malignant melanoma at 57. I am well at present.

Axiology

a. Power of story

Ellis in *The Ethnographic I*,31 a story about teaching and doing autoethnography, outlines the integral presence of story in life and autoethnography. I paraphrase:

‘graphis’ ... refers to story … communication in which humans make sense of their world. [It] is a tool of relationship … We recite nursery rhymes, sing lullabies, tell children about themselves when they were babies, … family stories … myths, … religious stories. Children and adults imbibe much of whom they are through the stories communicated to them; spoken and unspoken stories. They embody the stories. 'According to Shank32(2002), autoethnographic practitioners argue that we cannot know the real impact of significant events on people’s

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30 ‘First mother’ is the preferred term by many mothers who relinquished their babies to Adoption. ‘Birth mother’, ‘biological mother’, ‘natural mother’ and ‘relinquishing mother’ are alternatives preferred by some, objectionable by others.
31 Ellis. *The Ethnographic I*, 32.
lives unless we hear them described in their own words or chosen mediums of communication.’

People’s stories and their impact are honoured in spiritual direction and giving and receiving the Spiritual Exercises. Through story-telling, people discern what empowers and disempowers them. As Ellis says: ‘Given their importance, I argue that stories should be both a subject and a method of social science.’33

My story expressed in poetry, including narrative poetry, is a means through which I appropriate the graces of the Spiritual Exercises. In this thesis, I could have explored another person’s story but the advantage of using my own story is its immediacy. As Bonny says: ‘Spirituality demands a subjective stance, an allowing of immediacy.’34

b. Poetry and word

I am passionate about poetry. I value poetry as a vehicle of communication and personal formation. I value it as written and spoken. I value its potential to challenge and affirm others. This poetic autoethnography is invitational, exploratory and expansive. It opens new levels of awareness. Consistent with Ignatian spirituality, poetry seeks God in all things.

The heritage from the creation narratives in Genesis and the prologue of John’s gospel in the Christian scriptures is that God creates and communicates through the word. However I hear, see, touch and feel God in many creative ways.35 Poetry might say:

In the beginning was the Word; Heard; Touch; Taste; Smell; Feel; Intuition; Sight; Action; Breath; Relationship; Heart-beat, and Thought. John 1.1 says ‘the word was God’; the evangelist John uses ‘word’ poetically. In the sweetest powers of language, the best word, the greatest metaphor, he and I cannot say that our word is God, but we can say that my word and your word come from and reach into God. This is the work of poetry. It is the work and word of kardia or love to which Celtic poet, J Philip Newell refers:

If God were to stop speaking the whole created universe would cease to exist. In the rising of the morning sun God speaks to us

33 Ellis. The Ethnographic I, 32.
35 ‘God said, Let there be light. So there was light’. Genesis 1.3 (King James version). ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God’. John 1.1 (KJV).
of grace and new beginnings, and the fertility of the earth is a
sign of how life wells up from within, from the dark unknown
place of God.\textsuperscript{36}

In 1522, Ignatius of Loyola entered a contemplative period in a cave at Manresa,
Spain. When he emerged that same year, he spoke the word as he had heard it. We
hear him and God as we pray his legacy, the Spiritual Exercises, at our own cave of
meeting.

c. **Spirituality**

Values related to the pre-eminence of God, love, faith, relationships, personal growth,
learning, commitment, transparency, responsible freedom and social justice are
important to me. I value Ignatian spirituality as ‘a spirituality of choice at the level of
faith.’\textsuperscript{37} By this I mean that the choices available to me are not limited by my faith,
but the responses I make are consistently embedded in my desire to be authentic to
my ongoing creation.

I value a way of bringing together life’s polarities such as suffering and joy, creation
and destruction, good and evil. The unity or convergence of life’s polarities, such as
good and evil, love and hate, appears to contradict Ignatian dualistic terms of ‘good
spirit’ and ‘bad spirit’, however such a unity is consistent with the Ignatian value of
finding God in all things, in fact finding a holistic spirituality as Au explains:

every human concern [is] relevant. ... All aspects of a person’s
life must be subjected to the transforming influence of the Spirit.
Antithetical to a dualistic mentality that sees things as
irreconcilable opposites, holistic spirituality stresses a
complementary attitude that is integrative and inclusive.\textsuperscript{38}

I value holistic spirituality. All things contribute to my spiritual life, and my life in
God underpins all things. All of life offers an invitation to wholeness. As soon as I
choose to look at personal darkness in order to confess its hold, I have already loved
myself in vulnerability. Ignatian spirituality is consistent with this view.


I value my vulnerabilities as they invite me to expand my thinking. I value my strengths as God’s gifts to me. My mode of thinking needs to balance detail and scope, depth and breadth. Work, rest, exercise, nutrition, relationships, personal spiritual direction and supervision, and social interactions are philosophically valued but at times are challenging to embody or embrace.

My family and colleagues in ministry support my work as a writer, poet and researcher. Although writing poetry is generally a solitary activity, conversations with colleagues and many other people are indispensable in the formation of ideas. The ideas I write are the voices of many. Over the duration of writing this thesis, I have become aware that I am intricately connected to others without whom I could not have written this work at all. I deeply value these connections.

d. Participation and inter-subjectivity

Ignatian spirituality is a communal or participative spirituality which values encountering and finding God in all things. In the Ignatian imaginative gospel meditations in the Spiritual Exercises, believers are invited to encounter Jesus Christ, follow him and participate in Christian living. The word encounter in relation to a person who lived 2000 years ago might seem strange, and yet a cosmic spirituality accepts the present impact of all past things on all other things. Our imaginations are capable of a different level of seeing. Ignatius believed encounter between a person and the living God was possible. He said in Annotation 15 of the Spiritual Exercises [15]: ‘Leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord.’

The desire for an encounter with Christ finds both its source and goal in the living God. The Spiritual Exercises involve spiritual direction in which the encounter with God is paralleled by the reflective and prayerful encounter between a guide and the person guided.

39 Publishers also support me in Anthologies, and Journals including Divan; Earthsong; Eremos; Eureka Street; Famous Reporter; Going Down Swinging; Idiom; Page Seventeen; Poetrix; Presence; Spiritus; Studio and Westerly.

40 Pentecost is the traditional name given to the spiritual, empowering and holy experience recounted in Acts of the Apostles chapter 2.1-20. Pentecost is the embodiment (or incarnation) of the graces received in the Exercises.
Many of us engaged in Ignatian prayer and ministry share motivation, beliefs, desires, goals including apostolic goals and struggles. This mutuality makes much of my poetry available and resonant to this cultural group. In relation to the shared experience, Stern says:

Language itself could not arise if it did not have an intersubjective base. You do not talk to someone unless you believe that they can share your mental landscape and act accordingly.

Inter-subjective communication happens in the dialogue between poet and reader. It happens also at the unspoken level:

Our nervous systems are constructed to be captured by the nervous systems of others, so that we can experience others as if from within their skin, as well as from within our own. A sort of direct feeling route into the other person is potentially open and we resonate with and participate in their experience, and they in ours.

The Massage relates an experience of inter-subjectivity through touch, music and silence. I believe that my experience of God in all things can touch another’s experience of God, just as another’s experience can touch mine. I believe that inter-subjectivity can become poignant through the shared experience of poetry.

The Massage

He smiled and began
the staccato movements
across my shoulders.
Twenty minutes, he said,
for your neck as well – twenty dollars –
(Perhaps he showered two days ago).
OK, I said between the pointy prods.
(What damage can he do?)
And the music was beautiful as always.

44 Stern, *The Present Moment*. 76.
45 When I speak of ‘God’, I encourage the reader to insert their own word/symbol which best fits their experience or relationship with Mystery.
I surrendered to benevolence,
and his hands became soft
pliable conductors
in a warm and gentle symphony.

Epistemology

Stern speaks about two kinds of knowing, implicit and explicit:

Most simply, implicit knowledge is non-symbolic, nonverbal, procedural, and unconscious in the sense of not being reflectively conscious. Explicit knowledge is symbolic, verbalizable, declarative, capable of being narrated, and reflectively conscious.46

His studies of infants and non-verbal communication do not speak directly about these ways of knowing as having dimensions of mystical awareness, but there is a sense in which his description of implicit knowledge is mystical knowing.

The poem Kardia theology speaks of sentir, the union of head and heart.47

Kardia theology

Theology
I have felt your
solemn-type face
closed punctuation
and weighty tomes

I am the matchmaker

47 Jules J Toner. A Commentary on St. Ignatius's Rules for the Discernment of Spirits: A Guide to the Principles and Practice (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1982). 24-5. “Usually present in the meaning [of sentir] is a cognition which is basically intellectual; and often emotional or even mystical overtones are added. In various Ignatian writings ‘sentir’ indicates cognition savored so repeatedly that it becomes a framework of reference instinctively or affectively used to guide one’s thinking, deciding, and acting.” Kardia is from the original Greek Word Kardiva meaning ‘the heart’. Feminine Latin cor also means the heart. In the animal body, the heart, as the organ at the centre of the circulation of the blood, was regarded as the seat of physical and spiritual life; ‘heart’ also implies the vigour and sense of physical life; the centre of spiritual life; the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavours of the understanding; the faculty and seat of the intelligence of the will and character of the soul so far as it is affected and stirred in a bad way or good, or of the soul as the seat of the sensibilities, affections, emotions, desires, appetites, passions; of the middle or central or inmost part of anything, even though inanimate.
http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/kardia.html on 7 July 2010 3.49 pm.
proposing a partner
to lighten the night

fireworks
for your Jericho-self

A match born of passion
the union of head and heart
She is art: the poem.

I will strike alight
the match

*Kardia* indicates a depth of searching in order that the deeper potentiality of the human person can be brought progressively towards wholeness. In this work, writing poetry is understood as a mystical partnership in which God reveals our interior selves.\(^{48}\) The poem *Kardiatheology* is redrafted. Instead of ‘fireworks’ I originally wrote ‘a graffiti queen’ but it did not convey the sense of an interior change. The poem as it stands suggests that theology can be more integrated by embracing intuitive or heart ways of knowing along with the scientific method of knowing.\(^ {49}\)

Poetry as an art broadens and balances intellectual theological discourse, especially in the disciplines of spirituality and spiritual direction. In poetry and prayer, the body and spirit are united in the heart or καρδία (*kardia*) which refers to the seat of physical and spiritual life.\(^ {50}\) In prayerful poetry, body, mind and spirit converge in an expansive awareness of what is known. It alludes to, and holds in some way, what cannot be known.

Spiritual poetry is one artistic genre communicating and honouring the embodied story of the spirit of God in each person. It uses language which honours the


relationships between all things. It speaks universal stories. As poetry weaves words around experience including emptiness and wordlessness, it opens a window to encounter divine mystery. Although all discourse fails to speak literally about God, poetry humbly speaks to a personal God and creates a space in which others may enter into a relationship with God. This quality makes poetry a sacrament.

Bernard Lonergan in *Method in Theology* writes:

> Operations ... are seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, inquiring, imagining, understanding, conceiving, formulating, reflecting, marshalling and weighing the evidence, judging, deliberating, evaluating, deciding, speaking, writing.

Poetry summons cultural and linguistic frameworks from which all these operations acquire specific meanings.

The Australian Research Council does not include any dedicated peer-reviewed poetry journals as preferred publication sites for researchers. My view is that poetry more than any other literature has the capacity to speak to transcendent reality. It seems to me that theological institutions, whose contribution to the world of art and science is discourse about transcendent reality, ought to take seriously a role in lobbying for the inclusion of well-regarded poetry journals as valid research material.

Thomas Merton understood art as a window into the Mystery of God:

> the artist has ... inherited the combined functions of hermit, pilgrim, prophet, priest, shaman, sorcerer, soothsayer, alchemist and bonze.

Most of these roles have in common the ministry of speaking truth; often the truth is ‘we do not know’. Poetry therefore is a helpful in framing or holding the juncture between the knowable and unknowable.

Aristotle cautions us that an educated man expects only as much precision as the subject matter will admit. It is foolish to seek

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51 The word, sacrament, in the sense of the ‘sacrament’ of poetry is used to speak to the way in which poetry makes present that which it speaks about. It has the same sense for me as the Greek word ἀναμνήσις = anamnesis, which refers to the reality that what is absent is made present through signs and symbols and actions.

52 Lonergan, *Method in Theology*. 197

approximations from mathematicians as exactitudes from poets.\textsuperscript{54}

Exactitudes in poetry are possible in the mathematical elements of form and technique, but poetry as an art is open to interpretation.

Poetry is a tool of self-discovery. The process of poetry writing and editing invites the poet to explore meaning and truthfulness and uncover any distorted beliefs. Poetry used as a tool of self-supervision calls me forth to the Ignatian \textit{magis}, ‘the more’ of my potential in relation to the world.

The following poem asserts the positive relationship between poetry, prayer and autoethnography particularly in terms of the epistemological parallels.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{What has not been loved}

\textit{I will treat with love those nations}
\textit{that have never been loved.}

Romans 9.25 (CEV)

Poetry brings to life
what has not been loved;
the parts of me unknown
too atrophied to feel
or respond to love.

Poetry desires me, and I desire poetry
to reveal all that I can be.

Poetry is the energising light in me,
the resurrection of my body from the cave.

Poetry takes me into hell,
promises not to leave me alone.

Poetry enters into the darkness.

Three days. Three days
longing for the cool of day.

Three days to hear the whisper
in the gentle breeze,
\end{quote}

the still small voice outside the cave.
Poetry, you bring me out.
I do not know how.
When I am buried deeply in despair,
parts of me take shape.
I see their form before my eyes
and am surprised.

a. Knowledge in poetry

Hejinian asks: is there knowledge in poetry?\textsuperscript{55}

This thesis values a participative worldview, one in which a person can know something only through relationship with other entities. This inquiry is participative because all inquiries engage absent others and the self formed in participation. John Heron and Peter Reason in their article ‘A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm’ outline four inter-related ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical.\textsuperscript{56} Ignatian spirituality is practical because it asks a person to act on their consolations. This thesis is an action inquiry.

an action inquiry useful to the actor [myself] and the point of action [practioners in Ignatian spirituality], rather than a reflective science about action.\textsuperscript{57}

While the four ways of knowing are inter-related, all are based on the experience from which an actor presents, proposes and practises. The experiential element to the paradigm is understood as:

direct encounter, feeling and imaging the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing. It is knowing through participative, empathic resonance with a being, so that as knower I feel both attuned with it and distinct from it. It is also the creative shaping of a world through the transaction of imaging it, perceptually and in other ways. Experiential knowing thus articulates reality through inner resonance with

\textsuperscript{57} Heron and Reason. "A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm." 279.
what there is and through perceptually enacting its forms of appearing.\textsuperscript{58}

The autoethnographer who writes in poetry requires an ongoing inquiry and articulation of the emerging consciousness of the assumptions of the poem. I cannot know all my assumptions, but I hope to know more as the work progresses.

**Phenomenon**

Word, thought, a music phrase, colour, art:
I am inspired and compelled to begin with a word
on the page. It leads me, ushers me through corridors
of words, left and right, choices I have,
to reject, accept for reasons I do not know.
I follow the lover's desire to paint word pictures,
letting them be what they are.

All my poetry is both epistemological source and tool of communication. I maintain that there is knowledge in poetry but I agree with Hejinan’s claim about poetic knowledge as finite and mutable in her poem *Night Knowledge*.\textsuperscript{59}

**Night Knowledge**

My mortal state of knowing, gives
me no guarantee of what
will happen
So reality is a process
not an identity

In these instances there are no cues. It seems as if there is a cloud of knowing and ‘cloud of unknowing.’\textsuperscript{60} I believe that God is present in all awareness and is the foundation of all ways of knowing. Radcliffe asserts:

If I am to describe a human being truthfully, it is not enough for me to describe what is before my eyes. I am reaching out for


\textsuperscript{60} Anonymous. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. 14\textsuperscript{th} century book which is the basis of centering or apophatic prayer.
what cannot be fully told now, what can only be glimpsed at the edge of language. Poetry gives us an intimation of that more radiant and generous life which the imagination desires.  

Poetry is always layered. The knowledge communicated might be descriptive, but if it is truly poetry, it will be evocative of more. Emotional response is constitutive to knowledge in poetry. The resonance between poet and reader emerges as new shared knowledge: ideas, thoughts and imaginings.

In a conversation between poets Dennis Haskell and John Tranter, Haskell states:

> poetry’s most important role is still the traditional one of communicating a combination of deep emotion, complex thought and a spirituality that often seems to lie just outside the reach of language which constitutes the deepest expression of meaning available to humans. Since Modernism people have run away from poetry to the telephone, and the most urgent need of contemporary poetry is to get them running back.

The poem does not have the last word on knowledge. This makes it a safe, non-invasive, non-threatening form of communication. A poem gives choices: the reader can be open to a poem allowing it to touch the mind and soul. A poem does not demand an action. It invites a reader to reflect, to consider its meaning, to ponder its trustworthiness.

In relation to Dylan Thomas’ poem *Before I Knocked and Flesh Let Enter*, Seamus Heaney says the poetic voice speaks out of what could be either the moment of Christian annunciation or when the sperm fertilizes the ovum and spirit knocks to be admitted through the door of flesh.

Part of the invitational nature of poetry is its disarming, subversive poignancy typical of Heaney’s poetry. An example of this is in *Doubletake* where he begins: ‘Human beings suffer/ they get hurt and get hard/.’

Good poetry engages the reader through whatever means the poet can summon.

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62 Dennis Haskell, "A Poet's Perspective: If You Want To Communicate, Use a Poem " (Newcastle, 2011).
b. Word and shape as value

Words have ‘awesome’ power. Dabar (Hebrew) (דבר) – *speak or the word*, is always enfleshed. It is only understood in relation to the reality to which it points. My words are enfleshed. In this work, all words have meaning, shape, colour and texture. Space has meaning. *River Notes* (in miniature below) illustrates concrete (shaped) poetry in both positive and negative images. The poem is shaped as a river, but the sepia-toned space next to it illustrates a pensive face looking upwards. This image contributes to the poem’s narrative which is about a person contemplating a river.

![River Notes](image)

*Fig. 11. Negative and positive spaces in poetry*

*The Power of Nothing* intends to illustrate that the spaces and words interact to hold more meaning than the sum of their parts. This is the mystery of any collective including that of words. The words must work together in order to be fruitful.

**The power of nothing**

Always I would want to be mindful of You, but it is in my soul to neglect; to forget all but the conscious threads gathered to serve the one present thing.

Not so with you; You do not forget the child within you.
I think I am a poor image of You.
But I noticed this winter morning,
not one blade of grass was without
a crown of dew. You took away my breath,

kept my heart beating.
When I ache with longing
for more love than my heart can bear,
my one thought is the poetry of You

It matters only that
I surrender
to the space between the words;
the nothingness defining me.

The spaciousness of poetry reminds me of the potency of the Hindu sacred spoken intonation, Om or Aum. It communicates something of the immanence and transcendence of words. According to the Mandukya Upanishad,

‘Om’ is the one eternal syllable of which all that exists is … The past, the present, and the future are all included in this one sound.

Australian poet and philosophy professor Kevin Hart elevates poetry to a transcendent reality when he says: ‘Poetry answers to the absence of the Word … not even the word ‘God’ can do that.’

e. Gendered writing

All writing is gendered although that reality is not always self-evident. Masculine discourse has been characterized by Megan Simpson as “‘rational”,

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65 Aum’ or ‘Om’ in Sanskrit is the primordial sound. [http://www.lojajinarajadasa.com/7.3.e.SanscritDictionary.html](http://www.lojajinarajadasa.com/7.3.e.SanscritDictionary.html)
66 [http://hinduism.about.com/od/omaum/a/meaningofom.htm](http://hinduism.about.com/od/omaum/a/meaningofom.htm) The Upanishads form the core of Indian philosophy. They are understood by Hindus as an amazing collection of writings from original oral transmissions. See [http://hinduism.about.com/od/scripturesepics/a/upanishads.htm](http://hinduism.about.com/od/scripturesepics/a/upanishads.htm)
“representational”, “symbolic”, “coherent”, and “fixed”’. She comments on Jacques Lacan’s theory of subjectivity, wherein the primary transcendental signifier is the phallus. She says:

within this model, there is apparently no way for women to exist in the symbolic – in language – except in relation to the male.

As such, there is a temptation to define a feminist perspective as the opposite of these ‘masculine’ categories. My ‘gendered’ poetry will critique my disposition towards traditionally masculine and feminine categories. Johanna Drucker defines the important character of feminine writing, not as an essence that belongs to biological females, nor as a product of socially determined situations, but as:

a concept which critiques the relation between authority and language in the alignment of the patriarchal power termed ‘masculine’ with language itself.

I want my writing to honour masculine and feminine voices. I value poetry for its capacity to transcend dualistic, opposed and divisive categories and to honour common life experiences of birth, life and loss.

Language is a tool of inculturation but also individuation. I hope this poetic autoethnography contributes to a growing awareness of the power of language to incarcerate and liberate.

Voices in the writing

The voices in this thesis are those of scholars and my own, as well as the powerful voices which have impacted my story.

The only legitimate way to attempt the proposed research into the relevance of poetry to the journey of the Spiritual Exercises is to write the poetry, to research and present it in process and product. The poetry addresses human development, sexuality and spirituality, birth and death, abuse and injustice, power and vulnerability, grief and illness, constraint and freedom, silence and voice. The poems more specifically speak

69 Simpson, Poetic Epistemologies. 2.
to the graces of the Four Weeks of the Exercises: about fear and love, about following Christ, about staying with suffering, about rejoicing and celebrating with God. God’s voice is in the poetry.

Be the poem

Open yourself
and the white page

the face
empty of agenda

flawless face
that does not rise up
or judge

the easy to kiss face
wooed by pen and ink
shaping truth

the mirrored face
reading my mind
feeling my hand

showing my heart

I trust that my experiences in prayer and poetry emanate from the abiding wise mysterious presence of God. Peter Steele (1939 – 2012) Australian poet and Jesuit says:

You write a poem partly to see what will happen, this time round, when you put yourself in the presence of mystery.  

My experience is consistent with that of Rainer Maria Rilke in so far as he has a ‘tremendous longing … for direct experience [of God] but not for certainty.’

71 Steele, "Elemental Man." 1.
The ‘longing’ is intense, sweet and enough. Unknowing has its consolation. In poetry the unspeakable has a window for the sage and the curious.

Growing edges

In spiritual direction, I hear the poetic and poetry from the people who come to share with me, and I companion their emerging awareness of God in these prayerful representations. I have found that poets and self-proclaimed non-poets often begin to write prayer-poems during the Exercises retreat. This prayerful response penetrates levels of consciousness, most notably memories and deep desires. It helps to navigate the process and content of discernment and decision-making. When I keep my reflective journal of poetry and prose as I give the Exercises, I am aware that it assists the quality of my directing.

When researching literature which might be related to the present work, I found innumerable resources for the Weeks of the Exercises, the graces of the Exercises, poetry and the nature of poetry. None specifically addressed the relationship of writing poetry to the reception of the graces in the context of Ignatian spirituality as is the focus of this work. Using poetry as a tool of self-supervision is unique to this thesis. The contribution of poetry as a self-supervision tool pioneers ways of developing the professionalism of spiritual direction and other helping professions.

Spiritual direction is centred on a person’s dynamic relationship with God including the consequences of that relationship. It is a discipline similar to therapy which engages the unconscious. Poetry deals directly with the unconscious and for me, precipitates healing or is evidence of the healing itself.

‘Not I, but the poet discovered the unconscious’, wrote Freud. Other theoreticians such as Adler, Jung, Arieti and Reik also confirmed that the poets were the first to chart paths that science later followed.73 Moreno suggested the term ‘psychopoetry,’ as well as the term ‘psychodrama’ for which he is famous.74

73 Theodore Reik was a student of Freud, and Adler was one of Freud’s discussion group members in Vienna. Allison Stokes, Ministry After Freud (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1985). 132. Silvano Arieti was not a contemporary of Freud, but was born in 1914, and died in 1981. He is best-known for his theories on schizophrenia which were apparently opposed to Freudian theory. http://www.enotes.com/psychoanalysis-encyclopedia/schizophrenia
Some knowledge of the practice of poetry therapy can be helpful when using poetry in spiritual direction, although the focus of therapy is healing whereas the focus of spiritual direction is relationship with God. Poetry therapist, Nicholas Mazza, is aware that words are inadequate to speak all things. This idea is encapsulated in:

“It’s clear to me that with my children, I’ve experienced a poem that could never be written.”

Poetry can assist spiritual direction because it touches into the spiritual dimension of life, in a way that poetry therapy does not intend. The present thesis speaks to this difference and uses poetry examples to show that spirituality permeates all dimensions of life including silence.

This thesis offers creative options for spiritual directors and givers of the Spiritual Exercises. Practical exercises are included. I am in awe at the way that poetry has become a main focus of my life and am delighted that it has balanced the strong presence of applied science in my story.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the characteristics of autoethnography as multi-levelled writing in which the researcher and the researched are the same person. I have presented the strengths and vulnerabilities of the methodology, concluding that my proximity to the data, desire for self-knowledge and authenticity, and the inter-subjective nature of the work are strengths mirrored in Ignatius’ development of the Spiritual Exercises.

The process of poetic autoethnography and the distillation of poignant and relevant content in poetry are central to the way in which I have listened to and valued poetry and story in my own life and the stories of others, in this instance in spiritual direction and in giving the Spiritual Exercises to another person.

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75 Poetry Therapy received status as an accredited form of Therapy with the formation of The National Association for Poetry Therapy (NAPT) in the United States of America when in 1973, Morris Morrison drafted the first set of standards for poetry therapy certification. Ibid.
77 Mazza, *Poetry Therapy*. Acknowledgements (no page number).
Autoethnography is a participative inquiry. I have shown through autoethnographic writing that I honour the various relationships which have impacted my life, and I offer that relationship in turn to the reader. The underpinning theological and ontological beliefs and values are presented in the Introduction to the present work.

The chapter has presented the various influences on me as a writer and has shown that the writing has a dynamic impact on me and the setting in which the research is relevant.

Poetry, prayer, the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* and apostolic endeavour converge at the liminal place of invitation to extended ways of knowing. I have characterized this place as *sentir*. The content of poetic autoethnography is my life with its particular and universal stories. Poetic autoethnography voices experience through distilled language. It is open, invitational and relational. In the inter-subjective encounter with poetry, empirical knowing is extended by affective engagement with the form and content of the poem.

In terms of the thesis statements, this chapter has built on previous findings to show particularly that:

- Poetry as an art invites spiritual experience and is a language of spiritual experience. It clears out the extraneous material and includes material which distils rather than dilutes the important focus of spiritual direction which is the experience of being in relationship with God.
- Poetry is self-revelatory for both the poet and the reader, and includes rational and affective engagement and a liminal awareness which invites a deeper self-knowledge.

I conclude that writing and exploring poetry are appropriate and helpful for spiritual direction. The growth edges in poetic autoethnography are expanded in deep listening to what is said and not said. Awareness of multiple voices, gendered writing, and God in all things invites a deeper self-awareness and apostolic engagement.

As I deliver the findings of this research, spiritual directors and their directees will have the opportunity to become more aware of the power of both poetry and this research methodology.
This is my prayer, my poem
It is more in speaking less