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# *Untitled*

Or does a relationship need a label?

An investigation of Ruth 1:14-17/18

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## *Preface*

This thesis concludes an intensive and enriching year for me. I not only spent a year in a different country and context with people from all over the world, using a different language and following new standards, but I also learned a lot about myself, my abilities, my strengths, my preferences and my future.

Here I would like to thank everyone who was a part of this year and accompanied and supported me. I especially convey my thanks to my supervisor Dr. Marjo Korpel, who on the one hand supported and challenged me as much as she could in giving me advice, offering me insight into her own work and making her enormous library accessible to me, but on the other hand also gave me enough freedom to develop my ideas and try new things. Thank you!

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## 0. Introduction

The Book of Ruth is a book about two females, about Ruth and Naomi. Of course it is also about Naomi's husband and sons, Boas, the other redeemer, the women in Bethlehem and many more, but first and foremost it is a narrative about a woman and her unconditionally devoted daughter-in-law.

A leading question for me was: How can I get to know these two females, especially Ruth? Of course it is essential to meet them in their original context, to be historical-critically informed about their time and the conditions they lived in. So, I met 'the historical' Ruth (and Naomi) in several volumes, commentaries and articles that offer a solid and well-researched insight, but I must admit that that Ruth is 'dead', a fact to be analysed. But I also found a different Ruth. It was in the poems, songs, movies, books, paintings, lived theories and ideas where I met her, in our reception and perception. There, between the pages, she came alive. She might be sometimes misused, misinterpreted or overemphasised, but she is alive. She mirrors us, the ideas of our time, our presuppositions. She is our Ruth.

It is my aim in this thesis to introduce the reader to this Ruth based on her 'historical' roots, to introduce her in a way that many people can relate to.<sup>1</sup> And I think that many people are able and willing to relate to the story of Ruth and especially to Ruth's vow. During my research I had many discussions with people concerning my topic. For some it recalls memories because they used the verse in their wedding service or they know a couple that did so, some reject energetically any allusion to marriage in the story of Ruth and her vow and many others are in some way familiar with the German context. Therefore, my motivation in this thesis is to make the Ruth I met accessible to everyone who is willing to meet a strong female that inspires through and through. Feel invited to meet Ruth here in my words, but also encouraged to find her elsewhere in the reception history we call life.

The work will mainly concern the relationship between the two women and how it is verbalised (Ruth's vow) and will therefore focus on Ruth 1:14-17/18.<sup>2</sup> It will offer an exegetical insight into the questions of grammar, structure, different interpretational theories (lesbianism?), traditions (covenant and marriage) and reception. The link between the more creative part, where a main focus will be on the reception history of the relationship between Naomi and Ruth and Ruth's vow, and the exegetical part concerning grammar and structure will be the question of covenant and marriage allusion. In a last step an outlook on practical

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<sup>1</sup> In order to make my thesis relatable, I had to write it in a way that made it accessible not only to the theological readership, but to a broader audience. It was of course more difficult in the exegetical part. There many Hebrew terms are used, but I always tried to offer a translation and explanation.

<sup>2</sup> The boarder context will be considered when necessary.

theology will be offered by combining the findings of the analysis with the current topic of liturgical drafts for same-sex marriages in Germany.

To conclude, this thesis is an experiment. It will bind exegetical-analytical findings with modern lived reception history and actual recent practice in Germany and see what results from this.

## 1. Exegetical analysis of Ruth 1:14-17/18<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1 Translation<sup>4</sup>

Verse <sup>5</sup>	Hebrew <sup>6</sup>	English
8) αα	וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֲמִי לְשְׁתֵּי כַלְתֵּיהָ	And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law:
aβ	לָכֵן שׁוּבוּנָה	“Go, return;
aγ	אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אִמָּה	each of you to the house of her mother.
bα	יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד	Yahweh may show loyalty to you
bβ	כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי:	as you have done to the dead and me.
9) αα	יִתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם	Yahweh may give to you
aβ	וּמְצֹאן מְנוּחָה	and find for you a resting place
aγ	אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה	each of you in the house of her husband.”
bα	וַתִּשָּׁק לָהֶן	And she kissed them
bβ	וַתִּשָּׂאנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּיָנָה:	and they lifted up their voices and wept.
10)a	וַתֹּאמְרֵנָה לָּהּ	And they said to her:
b	כִּי־אָתָּךְ נָשׁוּב לְעַמֶּךָ:	“No, with you we will return to your people!”
11)αα	וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֲמִי שׁוּבוּנָה בְנֹתַי	And Naomi said: “Return, my daughters!
aβ	לָמָּה תֵּלְכֵנָה עִמָּי	Why should you go with me?
bα	הֲעוֹד־לִי בָנִים בְּמִעִי	Do I still have (in me) sons in my womb
bβ	וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְאֻנָּשִׁים:	and can they become husbands for you?
12)αα	שׁוּבוּנָה בְנֹתַי לָכֵן	Return, my daughters, go,
aβ	כִּי זָקַנְתִּי מִהַיּוֹת לְאִישׁ	because I am too old to have a husband.
bα	כִּי אֲמַרְתִּי יֵשׁ־לִי תִקְוָה	Even if I thought there was for me hope
bβ	גַּם הָיִיתִי הַלַּיְלָה לְאִישׁ	and even if I would have a husband tonight
bγ	וְגַם יִלְדֵתִי בָנִים:	and bear sons,
13)αα	הֲלֵהֶן תִּשְׁפָּרְנָה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ	would you therefore wait until they grow up,
aβ	הֲלֵהוּ תִעְגְּנָה	would you therefore keep yourself (secluded)
bα	לְבִלְתִּי הָיוֹת לְאִישׁ	from having a husband?
bβ	אֵל בְּנֹתַי כִּי־מְרַלִּי מְאֹד מִכֶּם	No, my daughters, I am very distressed more than you,

<sup>3</sup> All translations to English, except Ruth 1:8-18 (=translation of the author), refer, if not indicated differently, to the NRSV (“New Revised Standard Version”, BibleGateway, accessed June 25, 2018, <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-NRSV-Bible/>).

<sup>4</sup> This thesis focuses on Ruth 1:14-17/18, but these verses are dependent on the preceding verses 8-13. That is the reason why I include them in my translation and refer to them later on.

<sup>5</sup> The verses are structured according to the use of accents in the Masoretic Text. Part a of the verse is before and part b after the atnah. α, β and γ refer to either part a or b. The accent that marks the end of each part is the zaqeq (αα<sup>zaqeq</sup> aβ<sup>zaqeq</sup> aγ /Atnah/ bα<sup>zaqeq</sup> bβ<sup>zaqeq</sup> bγ). This does not necessarily imply that the unit is also closed concerning the content. It merely helps the writer of this paper to structure her analysis and hopefully the reader to follow it.

<sup>6</sup> K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5. Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997), 1320-1321.

b $\gamma$	כִּי־יָצְאָה בִּי יַד־יְהוָה:	because it has turned against me the hand of Yahweh.”
14)a $\alpha$	וַתִּשָּׂנוּ קוֹלָן	And they lifted up their voices
a $\beta$	וַתִּבְכֶּינָה עוֹד	and wept again
b $\alpha$	וַתִּשָּׂק עֹרְפָהּ לְחַמוֹתָהּ	and Orpah <sup>7</sup> kissed her mother-in-law,
b $\beta$	וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ:	but Ruth clung to her.
15)a $\alpha$	וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבִמְתְּךָ	And she said: “See, your sister-in-law has returned
a $\beta$	אֶל־עַמָּהּ וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֶיהָ	to her people and to her god(s).
b	שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי יְבִמְתְּךָ:	Return after your sister-in-law!”
16)a $\alpha$	וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל־תִּפְגַּעֵי־בִּי	And Ruth said: “Do not press me
a $\beta$	לְעִזְבֹךָ לְשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרַיךָ	to leave you behind, to turn from behind you
b $\alpha$	כִּי אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלָיךְ וּבְאֲשֶׁר תֵּלִינִי אֵלָיו	because wherever you will go, wherever you will lodge, I will lodge;
b $\beta$	עַמְּךָ עִמָּי	your people shall be my people
b $\gamma$	וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי:	and your God shall be my God.
17)a $\alpha$	בְּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת	Where you will die, I will die
a $\beta$	וְשָׁם אֶקָּבֵר	And there I will be buried
b $\alpha$	כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יִסְיֶיךָ	Yahweh will do me so and so
b $\beta$	כִּי הַמּוֹת	and even if death
b $\gamma$	יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ:	will separate you and me.
		----- <sup>8</sup>
18)a $\alpha$	וַתִּרְא	And she saw
a $\beta$	כִּי־מָתְאַמְצָת הִיא לָלֶכֶת אִתָּהּ	that she persisted in going with her
b	וַתִּחְזַל לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיהָ:	and she refrained from saying (something) to her.

## 1.2 Textual criticism

The Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia<sup>9</sup> makes only one remark pertaining to Ruth 1:14-17/18. In verse 14 the critical apparatus points to the fact that the Septuagint<sup>10</sup> adds καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν εἰς τὸν λαὸν αὐτῆς between b $\alpha$  and b $\beta$  and gives an adequate Hebrew translation for this addition. Therefore, v.14b in the LXX should be translated as following: “and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and returned to her people, but Ruth clung to her.” The Biblia Hebraica Quinta<sup>11</sup> names more textual witnesses (additional to LXX) that add information between b $\alpha$  and b $\beta$ : The Old Latin adds *et habit* (“and went away”), the Vulgate *ac reversa* (“and returned”), the Syriac “and

<sup>7</sup> b $\alpha$  verb-noun / b $\beta$  noun-verb (Cf. #1.5).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. #1.4 Text delimitation.

<sup>9</sup> Hereafter abbreviated BHS.

<sup>10</sup> Hereafter abbreviated LXX.

<sup>11</sup> Hereafter abbreviated BHQ.

turned back and went away [...]”<sup>12</sup> and the Targum records additionally *וּאִזְלַת לְאוֹרְחָהּ*, which can be translated as “and went on her way [...]”<sup>13</sup>. These witnesses are all indicated as “(explic)” in the critical apparatus of the BHQ, which means that the commentators regarded them as “not really adding new information to the text, but rather [...] making explicit information already implicit in the text [...]”<sup>14</sup> “namely, that Orpah’s kiss is a farewell gesture [...]”<sup>15</sup>. It is striking that all witnesses add the same kind of information, but phrase it differently. A common witness that is divergent from the Masoretic Text<sup>16</sup> therefore cannot be assumed.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the rule *lectio brevior probabilior*<sup>18</sup> can be applied in this case.

If we take a deeper look at the content, the verb *נִשָּׂק* must be translated as ‘to kiss’, but it can be argued whether the verb sometimes implies a ‘goodbye’ in the act of kissing. Koehler-Baumgartner offers, divergently from Gesenius<sup>19</sup>, the sub-meaning “to kiss [...] when departing 2S 19<sub>40</sub> 1K 19<sub>20</sub> Ru 1<sub>14</sub> [...]”<sup>20</sup>. In both given parallels (2S 19:40 and 1K 19:20) the verb form is in Qal and constructed with the preposition *לְ* and an object. In 2S 19:40 Barsillai is leaving after being kissed by the king and in 1K 19:10 Elisha wants to kiss his parents before departing. In Ruth 1:14 the verb is constructed in the same way and later in v.15 it becomes clear that Orpah has left the scene, because Naomi advises Ruth to follow the example of her sister-in-law. Furthermore, v.14 can be seen in connection with v.9.<sup>21</sup> In v.9 Naomi gives her daughters-in-law a goodbye kiss. Because of the chiasmic structure that connects the two verses, it can be assumed that the kiss in v.14 also symbolises a goodbye.<sup>22</sup> Mayer I. Gruber explains that “[i]n most cases where the Hebrew Scriptures refer to kissing it is a greeting exchanged between

<sup>12</sup> “Lamsa Bible Online – English Peshitta Translation (OT). Ruth 1”, Web.archive.org, accessed 30 April, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140209044349/http://www.aramaicpeshitta.com/OTtools/LamLams.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> D.R.G Beattie, *The Targum of Ruth. Translated, with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes. The Aramaic Bible. The Targums*, vol. 19 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark LTD, 1994), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Adrian Schenker et al., eds, *Biblia Hebraica, quinta editio cum apparatu critico novis curis elaborato* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004), XC.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremy Schipper, ed., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 7d (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 97.

<sup>16</sup> Hereafter abbreviated MT.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Schenker et al., *BHQ*, 52\*.

<sup>18</sup> “The shorter version is the more probable.”

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Gesenius et al., *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch*, siebzehnte Auflage (Leipzig: Verlag von F.C.W. Vogel, 1921), 527.

<sup>20</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, Benedikt Hartmann, and M.E.J Richardson, eds, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. Study Edition*, vol. I (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2001), 731.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Analysis of v.14 (#1.5).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Erich Zenger, ed., *Das Buch Rut*, Züricher Bibelkommentare (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986), 40.



close relatives[...]"<sup>23</sup> and characterises the use of נשק in v.9 and 14 as actions of “parting farewell”<sup>24</sup>.

In a nutshell, the addition in the LXX (and other witnesses) verbalises “die wortlose Entscheidung”<sup>25</sup> and explains what otherwise would be understood when reading v.9/14 and 15. The textual witness for all additions is not convincing (different phrasing of additions), especially because MT is “supported by 4QRuth<sup>b</sup>”.<sup>26</sup>

BHQ also indicates that LXX (and Syriac) adds δὴ καὶ σὺ in v.15b. It is judged an emphasis that has “been introduced by the copyist or translator.”<sup>27</sup> It stresses Naomi’s urge to send also her second daughter-in-law back to her family.

The last remark from the BHQ that will be discussed concerns the term וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֵיהָ in v.15 aβ. Firstly, the unclear textual evidence from 4QRuth<sup>b</sup> is given. Secondly, it is indicated that the Syriac lacks this term, but instead has “to her kinsmen[...]"<sup>28</sup> and thirdly, the Vulgate, the LXX and the Targum are considered unusable in this context. Most scholars argue that the term can be translated as “to her god” or “to her gods”.<sup>29</sup> Jeremy Schipper on the contrary states that the Hebrew term should be translated as “to her ancestors”.<sup>30</sup> He reasons this by taking a look at the context of the verse and possible intertexts. Furthermore, he sees the Syriac version as a possible ally for his thesis.<sup>31</sup> I understand his reasoning and especially the connection he draws between the verse and its immediate context, but I still disagree with him. The religious aspect of Ruth’s ‘clinging’ to Naomi as expressed in v.16-17 is crucial for the text. Ruth assimilates to Naomi’s religion and vows this even before Naomi’s God (v.17b). In terms of coherence between v.17by and 15aβ the term in v.15 should be translated as ‘to her god’.

On the whole, this thesis will follow the textual witness proposed by the MT in all the discussed cases.

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<sup>23</sup> Mayer I. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East*, Studia Pohl 12, vol. 1 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 330.

<sup>24</sup> Gruber, *Nonverbal Communication*, 332.

<sup>25</sup> Zenger, *Rut*, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Schenker et al., *BHQ*, 52\*.

<sup>27</sup> Schenker et al., *BHQ*, XC.

<sup>28</sup> Web.archive.org, “Peshitta Ruth 1”.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e.g. Irmtraud Fischer, ed., *Rut*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg im Breisgau/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2001), 142-143 / Kirsten Nielsen, ed., *Ruth: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 48.

<sup>30</sup> Schipper, *Ruth*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Schipper, *Ruth*, 99.

### 1.3 Analysis of the text

In the following the structure of the text will be analysed in two steps: firstly, the surface of the text concerning cohesion and secondly, the deep structure of the text concerning coherence.<sup>32</sup>

#### 1.3.1 *Oberflächenstruktur* / Surface structure

Ruth 1:14-17/18 contains several alliterations (homoiarkton) and anaphora. In v.15aβ (אֶל-עַמָּהּ / וְאֶל-אֱלֹהֶיהָ) the preposition אֶל is repeated. The use of the alliteration shows figuratively what the statement on the textual level declares: Orpah went home to her people and her god(s), and this makes sense, it is coherent. The same holds true for Ruth. Naomi's plea implies that Ruth should leave her for the sake of the coherence of her life. But Naomi is not the only one that makes use of alliterations. Ruth's speech from v.16 to 17 is also full of these stylistic devices. In v.16 she states that she does not want to leave Naomi behind (לֹא אֲזַבְּרָךְ לְשׁוּב). It seems as if she picks up Naomi's understanding of what is good for her and denies it: 'You think it is coherent for me to leave you behind. I tell you what is coherent for me: תִּלְכִּי אִינִי / תִּלְיִנִי אִלַּיִן / תִּלְיִנִי אִלַּיִן / תִּלְכִּי אִינִי (v.16) / תִּמְוֹתַי אִמְוֹת (v.17). There will be me and there will be you (form of the verb beginning with ת or א), but we will share the same root (root of the verb/noun).' Furthermore, it is possible to see a pattern (anaphora) within v.16-17:

V.16bα		[...] כִּי
V.16bα	[...]	אֲשֶׁר
V.16bα	[...]	וּבְאֲשֶׁר
V.17aα	[...]	בְּאֲשֶׁר
V.17bα	[...]	כֹּה
V.17bα	[...]	וְכֹה
V.17bβ		[...] כִּי
(V.18aβ		[...] כִּי)

Ruth starts by saying 'I am going with you wherever you will go, now and always' and ends with the affirmation that not even death can break this connection and her will to stay with Naomi. Between this 'bracket', she emphasises that she will also lodge and die where Naomi

<sup>32</sup> Cohesion concerns everything that is expressed within the text on a grammatical level, the surface structure of the text. Coherence concerns the level of content, the deep structure of the text. (Cf. Helmut Utzschneider and Stefan Ark Nitsche, *Arbeitsbuch Literaturwissenschaftliche Bibelauslegung. Eine Methodenlehre zur Exegese des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 69-77.)

does and she vows this in front of Yahweh. This has a symbolic meaning: Yahweh is in the midst of their relationship. Additionally, the oath formula can be seen as an alliteration in itself:

כֹּה נַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יִסְיֶף

‘You see, Naomi. Nothing can come between us (בֵּינִי וּבֵינָהּ v.17, another alliteration), not even death.’

The togetherness of Naomi and Ruth is also underlined by the usage of suffixes. The following chart will show this:

	Daughters-in-law		Naomi
V.14		קוֹלָן	לְחַמוֹתַי / בָּהּ
	Oprah		
V.15		יְבַמְתִּי	
	אֶל-עַמִּי וְאֶל-אֱלֹהֵיהָ		
-----			
V.16		אֶל-תִּפְגַּעֵי-בִי	לְעֻבָּה לְשׁוּב מֵאֲתָרַי
			תִּלְכִּי אִלַּי תִּלְיַנִּי אֵלַי עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֵיהָ אֶלַּי
V.17		תְּמוֹתַי אֲמוֹת	
		כֹּה נַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי	
		בֵּינִי וּבֵינָהּ	
V.18		אֲתָהּ / אֵלַי	

In v.14 Ruth and Orpah are first referred to as a unity (14a), but then they become individuals (14b).<sup>33</sup> The author links both their decisions to Naomi (kissing her/clinging to her). After that, Naomi encourages Ruth to follow the example of her sister-in-law. There, in v.15, Orpah becomes the individual that has just left the scene and Ruth the one that should do likewise. Now Ruth takes over and acts as an individual with an opinion of her own. ‘Naomi, this concerns me as well. “Do not press *me* to leave *you* behind, to turn from behind *you*.”’<sup>34</sup> In her

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Phyllis Tribble, “Two women in a man’s world”, *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 59, No. 3 (Fall 1976): 256, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41177998>.

<sup>34</sup> Ruth 1:16.

vow she does not use the first person plural ('us'), but rather the first and the second person singular ('you/me'). Ruth and Naomi stay individuals, but they move in the same direction and they share the same root. Ruth does not say 'Yahweh will be our God', but 'Your God will be my God, that I will promise.' Ruth and Naomi will not unite their identities or find a merging middle way. Ruth will rather assimilate to Naomi's ethnicity, religion and direction in life. Now Naomi stays (finally?) silent. She accepts Ruth's decision (v.18). The narrative moves on, which is stressed by the particle וַיִּ. The particle וַיִּ is used three times within the text and has a structuring function. Another element that has to be mentioned is the oath formula in v.17b $\alpha$ . It underlines the importance of Ruth's words and gives them official meaning and value.<sup>35</sup>

The text consists of different kinds of discourse:

v.14	narrative
v.15	speech Naomi (וַתֹּאמֶר)
v.16-17	speech Ruth (וַתֹּאמֶר)
v.18	narrative

The narrative (v.14.18) and Naomi's speech are told in the *Imperfectum konsekutivum*, which is interrupted by a verb in the *Afformativkonjugation* in v.14b $\beta$ , two imperatives in v.15b and 16a $\alpha$  and a participle clause in v.18a $\beta$ . The *Imperfectum konsekutivum* describes a "Prozess in der Vorzeitigkeit".<sup>36</sup> In Ruth's speech (vow), after an imperative (v.16a $\alpha$ ), the *Präformativkonjugation* is used suddenly, which expresses "Nachzeitigkeit, genereller Sachverhalt"<sup>37</sup>. Ruth talks about the future. Her vow will count for the future, in every possible and general case. When the tense changes from *Imperfectum konsekutivum* to the *Präformativkonjugation*, the sentences also become more complex (hypotaxis). This stresses the fact that for Ruth it is not as easy as Naomi imagines it. Things are more complicated. Her connection with Naomi is stronger than her wish for a secure future in her home country. This influences her decision.

### 1.3.2 Tiefenstruktur / Deep structure

The text consists of several *Leitworte/Leitwortverbindungen* which contribute to the coherence of the text. One *Leitwortverbindung* are the verbs שׁוּב/עֹזֵב (v.16a $\beta$ /v.15a $\alpha$ .15b.16a $\beta$ ) in contrast with the verbs הִלֵךְ/דָּבַק (v.14b $\beta$ /v.16b $\alpha$ /18a $\beta$ ). These roots stress the point of

<sup>35</sup> This will be analysed further in a later chapter.

<sup>36</sup> Helmut Utzschneider and Stefan Ark Nitsche, *Arbeitsbuch Literaturwissenschaftliche Bibelauslegung. Eine Methodenlehre zur Exegese des Alten Testaments* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 84.

<sup>37</sup> Utzschneider/Nitsche, *Arbeitsbuch*, 84.

disagreement between Naomi, who wants Ruth to leave, and Ruth, who strongly disagrees and decides to cling to Naomi. Furthermore, the nouns עמא and אלהיא occur each three times, always in connection with each other (v.15aβ.16bβ.16bγ)<sup>38</sup>. In v.15 Naomi uses both nouns to convince Ruth to leave her as her sister-in-law did: ‘Go back, she did it as well. She returned to her people and her god(s). Are they not also your people and your god(s)?’ Apparently, as we see in v.16, this is not the case for Ruth. She also uses the terms, but in a different way. ‘You think I should go back to my people, my god(s)? I tell you something, no, I rather promise you something: “Your people shall be my people and your God shall be my God.”’<sup>39</sup> A last root that can be seen as a *Leitwort* (three times) is מות (v.17aα.17bβ). Ruth’s loyalty endures until and beyond death. That is what we call forever. It is striking that the Hebrew term for mother-in-law (לַחְמוּתָהּ, v.14bα) also contains the root מות. Does this refer to the fact that Naomi is older, closer to death? Or does it describe the hopelessness of Naomi’s future and the future of Ruth if she stays with her? This is a question of interpretation, but I think that it is not a coincidence that the terms ‘mother-in-law’ and later ‘death/dying’ are used together.

Moreover, it is possible to name several semantic fields:

Goodbye/farewell:

- v.14aα      וּתְשׁוּבָה קוּלָן
- v.14aβ      וּתְבָכְיָנָה עוֹד
- v.14bα      וּתִשָּׂק
- v.15aα      לְשׁוּבָה
- v.15b        שׁוּבֵי אֶתְרֵי
- v.16aβ      לְשׁוּבֵי מֵאֶתְרֵיךְ

Religious sphere/ethicality:

- v.15aβ      אֶל-עַמָּה וְאֶל-אֱלֹהֶיהָ
- v.16bβ      עַמֶּךָ עַמִּי
- v.16bγ      וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי
- v.17bα      כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יִסְיֶף

Movement/travel:

- v.16bα      תִּלְכִּי אִלַּי וּבְאֶשֶׁר תִּלְיִנִי

<sup>38</sup> In v.15aβ, in v.16bβ עמא and in 16bγ אלהיא, x behind the root means that different suffixes are used together with the nouns.

<sup>39</sup> Ruth 1:16.

- v.18aβ      לְלֶכֶת  
 Arguing/resistance:  
 v.14bβ      דְּבַקָּה  
 v.15aα      נְשָׁבָה<sup>40</sup>  
 v.16aα      אֶל־תִּפְגַּע־יָדַי  
 v.18aβ      מִתְאַמְצָת

The semantic fields sum up the content of the text very well. The text is partly about leaving and saying goodbye, but also about travelling and moving. Naomi and Ruth argue about this issue (leaving or moving together?) and their arguments involve a religious and ethnic aspect and of course words that belong to the semantic field of arguing and resistance.

This leads us to the question of thematic reduction. To analyse this, v.8-13 will also be considered, because v.14-17/18 belong thematically to the anterior unit and therefore cannot stand alone.<sup>41</sup>

8-9	N's recommendation			
10	Response of DIL	8-13	N tries to convince O&R	
11-13	N's argumentation			
14	R&O's decision	14	decision R&O	8-18 staying/leaving DIL and its consequences
15	N's objection			
16-17	R's vow	15-18	consequences	
18	N resigns			

The text is really coherent. Not only is it possible to reduce the text to one topic, but there is also a clear structure visible. Naomi starts the discussion, and her 'judgement' of Ruth's decision frames the end of the sequence. Furthermore, after every statement of Naomi, a response/action of the daughters-in-law/Ruth/Orpah follows. V.14 can be seen as the climax/turning point and is also located in the middle of the scheme. Structure and content convey together the message of the text.

The vow of Ruth can also be structured thematically. To highlight this, the scheme of Murray D. Gow that Hans-Georg Wüch<sup>42</sup> also applies in his commentary will be used:

A	Ruth prohibits further discussion	Entreat me not to forsake you, to return from following you.
B	Affirmation of loyalty to Naomi in life	For where you go, I will go,

<sup>40</sup> Named here because it is an imperative.

<sup>41</sup> Abbreviations: Naomi (N), Orpah (O), Ruth (R), daughters-in-law (DIL).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Wüch, ed., *Buch Rut*, Edition C Bibelkommentare Altes Testament, vol. 10 (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1998), 103.

		and where you lodge, I will lodge.
C	Central Confession	Your people shall be my people and your God my God.
B'	And in death	Where you die, I will die and there shall I be buried.
A'	Confirmed with oath thus silencing Naomi	Thus may Yahweh do to me, and thus may he add, if even death separate me from you. <sup>43</sup>

It is visible how Ruth's decision that she wants to assimilate to Naomi's ethnicity and religion is bracketed by the promise of loyalty in life and beyond. The outer bracket consists of her plea to Naomi (not to keep her from staying) and her oath to Yahweh. Here she affirms her belonging to Naomi's religion. Once again we see that the religious aspect is central for Ruth and for her vow (cf. #1.2 interpretation Schipper).

In a last step the structure of the sentences will be analysed. V.9 and 14 and v.14b are chiasmic, which will be explained further in #1.5. In addition, there are several parallelisms in the text:

v.16bα אֶל-אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֵלָי  
וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְיְנִי אֵלָיִן  
v.17aα בְּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת

This parallelism underlines Ruth's message. She wants to go, lodge and die wherever Naomi does. All three actions are of equal value, parallel. Ruth wants to live her life parallel to Naomi's. She assimilates to her life, which is furthermore emphasised by the parallelism in v.16bβ and 16bγ: עִמָּי / עִמָּי אֵלָיִן / וְאֵלָיִן אֵלָיִן. A last parallel structure can be found in v.15b and v.16aβ: לְשׁוֹב מֵאֶתְרָי / לְשׁוֹבֵי אֶתְרִי יִבְמַתָּהּ. Naomi encourages Ruth to follow Oprah, which is ignored by Ruth. She asks her not to press her to do so, because following Oprah is parallel/equal to leaving her, which she definitely does not want to.

### 1.3.3 Summary

To sum up, the text consists of several elements that establish both cohesion and coherence within the text. Concerning cohesion the many alliterations used by both Ruth and Naomi should be mentioned as well as the anaphora that structure the text. Another important element are the suffixes that underline the message of the text on a grammatical level and the change of tense (and taxis) from *Imperfectum konsekutivum* to the *Präformativkonjugation* during the

<sup>43</sup> Murray D. Gow, *The Book of Ruth. Its Structure, Theme and Purpose* (Leicester: APOLLOS, 1992), 37.

vow. On the level of coherence we can see a clear connection between the presented *Leitworte/Leitwortverbindungen*, the semantic fields and parallelism. It is not difficult to condense the text into one topic, and other structuring elements can be found using the thematic reduction.

#### 1.4 Text delimitation

If we taking a look at different commentaries and books about the structure of the Book of Ruth, it can be said that scholarship disagrees on the delimitation of the different passages, also concerning Ruth 1:14-18.<sup>44</sup> Marjo Korpel accuses most scholars of ignoring the “evidence with regard to unit division found in the ancient manuscripts.”<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, they do not reveal their method and argumentations and often base their structural division on content.<sup>46</sup> According to her, Ruth 1:14-18 is divided into three canticles: 14, 15-17 and 18-19. In verse 14 the subject changes from Naomi to the daughters-in-law, who experience different emotions within the verse. Additionally, Korpel emphasises the “pivotal function”<sup>47</sup> of v.14 as expressing “the decision that will determine not only her [Ruth] own future, but also that of the entire nation of Israel [...]”<sup>48</sup> Its position and importance might have changed in the course of time. In v.15-17 the subject changes to Ruth. Thematically the canticle concerns Ruth’s vow to Naomi. Supported by several textual witnesses and a change of subject back to Naomi, Korpel separates 18-19 from 15-17. Furthermore, this part is characterised by the silence between Ruth and Naomi, who accepts Ruth’s decision nonverbally. This silence endures until they reach Bethlehem. They finally continue the trip they had started in v.7.<sup>49</sup> The division of Korpel is convincing and based on the findings in the manuscripts and not on content. I already highlighted the importance of v.14 and also indicated the issue of including or excluding v.18 in the discussion. By separating the verse visually from the rest of the text I admitted its formal distinctiveness. In any case I found several arguments for including it in my analysis of the text, which I will sum up in the following.

If we take a look at the structure of the anaphora pointed out in #1.3.1, v.18 is included in brackets, because the particle ׀ is used. This particle can rather be regarded as marking the continuation of the narrative (from v.14) than belonging to the structure of the vow (anaphora

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. e.g. for an overview Marjo Korpel, ed., *The Structure of the Book of Ruth*, Pericope. Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity, vol. 2 (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2001), 5-29.

<sup>45</sup> Korpel, *Ruth*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Korpel, *Ruth*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Korpel, *Ruth*, 80.

<sup>48</sup> Korpel, *Ruth*, 80.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. for the whole paragraph Korpel, *Ruth*, 79-81.



structure). In v.18 the suffixes אֱלֵי / אֲנִי are used. It is the first time that the narrator refers to Ruth (from the perspective of Naomi) using the third person singular, as already done in v.15 concerning Orpah. Before that, Ruth is addressed in the second person singular, parallel to the use of the second person plural in v.14 (and before) for the daughters-in-law. In v.15 Naomi clearly accepts Orpah's decision which followed her recommendation, but ignores that of Ruth, while in v.18 she accepts that of Ruth likewise. This is underlined by the use of the third person singular. V.18 therefore concludes, in a way, the matter of discussion with Naomi's acceptance. The different types of discourse also support the inclusion of v.18 because it brackets the speech of Naomi and Ruth together with the narrative in v.14. Furthermore, the tense and taxis shift back after the vow to its anterior status (*Imperfectum konsekutivum* and parataxis). When it comes to the semantic connection of v.18 with the rest of the text, it is not possible to find any of the given *Leitworte/Leitwortverbindungen*, but we find traces of the semantic field of movement/travel (v.18aβ לָלֶכֶת) and arguing/resistance (v.18aβ מְתַמְצֵת). V.18 clearly belongs to the scheme found during the thematic reduction. V.18 corresponds to v.8-9/15, which explains why it is needed as regards content. M.D. Gow also describes v.18 as belonging to the unit of v.15-17. For him it is part of the dialogue: Naomi (v.15), Ruth (v.16-17), Naomi (v.18).<sup>50</sup> V.19 then belongs to the “**Narrative frame**”,<sup>51</sup> as v.7 does.

To conclude, I would like to find a compromise between the textual evidence presented by Korpel and my thematic findings concerning the content (supported by Gow). I recognise that v.18 does not belong to v.15-17, but I will include it in my analysis when needed as regards the content. Moreover, it must be emphasised that in the first place Naomi's reaction to Ruth's vow is silence. We therefore have to imagine a moment of speechlessness after v.17. This is followed by the silent acceptance of Ruth's decision which closes the debate from v.8 onwards. The instance of this speechlessness should not be forgotten.

### 1.5 Special analysis of v.14

In the following I will analyse v.14 closely. First of all the translation of Ruth 1:14 will be given again.

Ruth 1:14:

- aα And they lifted up their voices
- aβ and wept again
- bα and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Gow, *Ruth*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Gow, *Ruth*, 31.

bβ **but Ruth clung to her.**

As several commentaries point out, Ruth 1:14 is connected to v.9 in a special way.<sup>52</sup> To demonstrate this, Phyllis Trible’s scheme will be used in the following:<sup>53</sup>

V.9b	A	Then <u>she<sup>a</sup> kissed<sup>b</sup> them<sup>c</sup>.</u>	B’	<u>Then they lifted up their voices</u> <u>and wept again.</u>
V.14	B	<u>and they lifted up their voices</u> <u>and wept</u>	A’	and <u>Orpah<sup>c</sup> kissed<sup>b</sup> her mother-in-law<sup>a</sup></u> but <u>Ruth<sup>c</sup> clung<sup>b</sup> to her<sup>a</sup>.</u>

Two observations can be made after reading v.9 and v.14 together. First, the two verses are “chiastic in parts and in whole [...]”<sup>54</sup>. In v.9 Naomi’s goodbye kiss is followed by weeping of the daughters-in-law, while v.14 starts with their weeping and results in a kiss. Orpah’s kiss can be considered a goodbye kiss because of v.15, where Naomi tells Ruth to follow the example of her sister-in-law who has already left.<sup>55</sup> Second, the inner structure (A and A’) is chiastic as well. The kiss giver in v.9bα (Naomi) becomes the kiss receiver in v.14bα and one of the kiss receivers from v.9bα (Orpah) becomes the kiss giver in v.14bα. But what happens with Ruth, the second kiss receiver from v.9bα? What does she do? She does not give Naomi a goodbye kiss. Her deviating reaction will now be analysed grammatically, for which it is necessary to take a look at the Hebrew text (Masoretic Text):

לְחַמוֹתָהּ עֲרַפָּה וַתִּשָּׂק	and kissed Orpah mother-in-law her
בָּהּ: דָּבְקָה וְרוּת	and/but Ruth clung to her.

While Orpah’s reaction in v.14bα (kiss) is constructed parallel to the one of Naomi in v.9b (וַתִּשָּׂק עֲרַפָּה / וַתִּשָּׂק לָהֶן), Ruth’s reaction is expressed with an “invertierten Verbalsatz”<sup>56</sup> (inverted verbal clause). The order of the sentence is not verb-subject-object, but subject-verb-object. That means that v.14b is chiastic in itself as well (14bα/14bβ).<sup>57</sup> This stylistic device (chiasm) underlines that Orpah acts according to Naomi’s advice (same sentence structure) and Ruth does not. She breaks out and becomes, as the subject of the sentence, “die herausgehobene Satzstellung vor dem Verbum [...]”. Es ist die erste Einzelaktion der Ruth [...]”<sup>58</sup>. Until v.14b

<sup>52</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, ed., *The Book of Ruth*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1988), 115 / Trible, “Two women”, 256.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Trible, “Two women”, 256. (Colours and highlighting changed and adjusted by the author of this paper.)

<sup>54</sup> Trible, “Two women”, 256.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Schipper, *Ruth*, 97.

<sup>56</sup> Fischer, *Rut*, 141-142.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, 142 / Hubbard, *Ruth*, 115.

<sup>58</sup> Zenger, *Rut*, 40.

Oprah and Ruth are referred to as a “unity”: in v.10 they disagree simultaneously and they weep together in v.9 and 14a. This changes in v.14b. Here, they become individuals, take their own decision and act according to it.<sup>59</sup>

Before we focus on Ruth clinging to Naomi, it is important to mention that “the story implies no negative judgement on Orpah’s action. She has obeyed Naomi, thereby reducing her pain, and she acts as the demands of community and custom dictate.”<sup>60</sup> Or as Phyllis Tribble sums it up: “Orpah does the expected, Ruth the unexpected.”<sup>61</sup> It is in contrast with the understandable and perhaps wise decision of Orpah that Ruth’s actions sticks out.<sup>62</sup> If we take the social context of Naomi, Orpah and Ruth into account, Naomi’s argumentation in v.8-13 seems plausible.<sup>63</sup> Naomi is not able to offer her daughters-in-law anything, because “in the world in which they live, security and wellbeing are dependent on a link with some male.”<sup>64</sup> From a rational perspective a future with Naomi was not appealing and bright. Orpah’s choice of leaving her was a choice for own sake.<sup>65</sup> It is necessary to keep this in mind when evaluating Ruth’s action in the following.<sup>66</sup>

First, the Hebrew term **לְרִיבָהּ** will be analysed in detail. As already mentioned, the subject of the sentence is Ruth. The appertaining predicate is **לְרִיבָהּ**, which is the third person singular feminine perfect qal of **רִיבָהּ**.<sup>67</sup> It is constructed with the preposition **לְ** with a third person singular feminine suffix. The suffix refers to Naomi. **רִיבָהּ** means literally ‘to stick to’ (‘zusammenhaften, zusammenkleben’<sup>68</sup> / to be glued together, to stick together).<sup>69</sup> In its

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Tribble, “Two women”, 256.

<sup>60</sup> Frederic Bush, ed., *Ruth/Esther*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 9 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1996), 86.

<sup>61</sup> Tribble, “Two women”, 256.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Hubbard, *Ruth*, 115.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. K. Lawson Younger, ed., *Judges/Ruth*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), 421.

<sup>64</sup> Younger, *Ruth*, 421.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Tribble, “Two women”, 256.

<sup>66</sup> The issue of Ruth & Orpah is not black & white. Orpah is not the “one of many who, for lack of faith at the crucial moment, miss out on the kingdom of God [...]” (John R. Wilch, ed., *Ruth*, Concordia Commentary. A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Pub. House, 2006), 165.), as John R. Wilch phrases it (this is a sweeping judgement which is not supported by any textual evidence). She decided according to what Naomi had advised her and there is no harm in that. The intention of the author might rather be: “Der eigentliche Zweck der Rückkehr Orpas nach Moab liegt freilich darin, daß die Gestalt Ruts in einem noch helleren Licht erstrahlt.” (Yair Zakovitch, ed., *Das Buch Rut: ein jüdischer Kommentar*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien, vol. 177 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999), 95)

<sup>67</sup> The verb is used four times within the Book of Ruth in Ruth 1:14 and in 2:8.21.23. In chapter 2 it is used in reference to the servants (v.21) or to the young women (v.8.23). Ruth is advised by Boas to stay/keep close to them. In v.23 the verb is also constructed with the preposition **לְ**, while in the other two verses it is the preposition **עִי**. For further information on the interpretation of these verses see Zakovitch, *Rut*, 95.116.129-131.

<sup>68</sup> G. Wallis, “**רִיבָהּ**”, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. II (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz: Verlag Kohlhammer, 1977), 84.

<sup>69</sup> Yael Ziegler explains the meaning of the term as following: “one party embraces the totality of the Other, utterly and completely.” (Yael Ziegler, ed., *Ruth. From Alienation to Monarchy*, Maggid Studies in Tanakh – The Stone Edition (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd, 2015), 155)

metaphorical meaning it can describe “die Beziehungen zwischen Menschen [...] sowohl freundlicher als auch feindlicher Natur [...]”<sup>70</sup>. Among other meanings<sup>71</sup> it can also characterise the relationship with God.<sup>72</sup> In Ruth 1:14 and in Gen 2:24 and Gen 34:3 as well, קָבַץ is constructed with קָ and an object (name or suffix; a person).<sup>73</sup> Gesenius suggests translating all three passages by ‘jem. fest anhängen’<sup>74</sup>, while Koehler-Baumgartner (2001) translates Gen 2:24.34:3 by ‘to cling, cleave to [...] (to his wife)’<sup>75</sup> and Ruth 1:14 in a different column as ‘to cling to, stick to’<sup>76</sup>. Interesting is that the older version of Koehler-Baumgartner (1953) makes an even greater distinction between the translation of the two passages in Genesis and Ruth 1:14. The suggested translation for Gen 2:24.34:3 is the same as in Koehler-Baumgartner (2001), but in the case of Ruth it is ‘to keep close to’<sup>77</sup>. Why am I mentioning the two passages of Genesis and comparing the given translations? The reason for this is the fact that Gen 2:24 can be compared to Ruth 1:14 for several reasons and when investigating Ruth 1:14bβ several commentaries and articles hint at these similarities.<sup>78</sup> As already mentioned, both verses use the verb קָבַץ with קָ and an object (name or suffix; a person). In Gen 2:24 the subject is the man and the object of ‘clinging to’ his wife, while in Ruth 1:14 the subject is Ruth and Naomi the object of ‘clinging to’. Additionally, Gen 2:24 mentions that the man has to leave behind his father and mother in order to cling to his wife. This aspect is not included in Ruth 1:14, but appears later on in Ruth 2:11<sup>79</sup> and to a certain degree in Ruth 1:8αγ. In Ruth 2:11 Boas is talking to Ruth and praises her character by referring to what she had done for Naomi, her mother-in-law. She had left her mother and father and stayed with Naomi. According to Irmtraud Fischer, both passages (Ruth 1:14.2:11), but especially Ruth 2:11, echo Gen 2:24.<sup>80</sup> To make the parallels between Gen 2:24 and Ruth 1:14/1:8/2:11 clearer, they will be contrasted in the following:

Ruth 2:11      וְאֵת־אִמּוֹ אֶת־אָבִיו גַּעֲזַב־אִישׁ עַל־כֵּן      Gen 2:24      וְאִמּוֹ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִשׁוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲדָמָתוֹ

<sup>70</sup> Wallis, “קָבַץ”, 85.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. also “1. *intr.* ankleben [...] v. ungerechtem Besitze, der an d. Hand klebt [...] 2. Von Personen: an einem Besitze festhalten [...] jmd. fest anhängen [...] einem Weibe [...], einem Könige [...], den Heiden [...], d. Sünde [...] 3. v. Übeln: anhängen, erreichen [...]” (Gesenius et al., *Handwörterbuch*, 152).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Wallis, “קָבַץ”, 86.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Gesenius et al., *Handwörterbuch*, 152.

<sup>74</sup> Gesenius et al., *Handwörterbuch*, 152.

<sup>75</sup> Koehler/Baumgartner/Hartmann/Richardson, *Lexicon*, 209.

<sup>76</sup> Koehler/Baumgartner/Hartmann/Richardson, *Lexicon*, 209.

<sup>77</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds, *Lexikon in veteris testamenti libros* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), 199.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. e.g. Fischer, *Rut*, 141-142.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, 142.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, 142.

(Ruth 1:8ay אִמָּהָ לְבֵית אִשָּׁה)

Ruth 1:14bβ בָּהֶ: בְּרָקָה וְרֹות בְּאִשָּׁתוֹ וְדָבַק

To sum up, the two common elements are the verb דָּבַק with object and the motive of having to leave father and mother beforehand (before the ‘clinging’). It is impossible to deny these common elements, but what does it mean for the interpretation/translation of Ruth 1:14bβ? Before evaluating this question further, it is helpful and interesting to take a look at the two verses (Gen 2:24 and Ruth 1:14) in the Septuagint.<sup>81</sup> The *Theologisches Wörterbuch des Alten Testaments* points out that the adequate translation of דָּבַק in Greek would be προσκολλαω/κολλαω.<sup>82</sup> Since the two verses in the Masoretic Text<sup>83</sup> use the same verb and a parallel construction, we could expect to find the same Greek term in the LXX. Instead, this is what LXX offers:

Ruth 1:14bβ<sup>84</sup> Ρουθ δὲ ἠκολούθησεν αὐτῇ

Gen 2:24<sup>85</sup> καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ

To make it clearer, the German translation of the LXX<sup>86</sup> will be given as well:

Ruth 1:14bβ “Ruth aber folgte ihr.”<sup>87</sup>

Gen 2:24 “Und sich mit seiner Frau verbinden (...).”<sup>88</sup>

It is not difficult to see that ἠκολούθησεν is not the same as προσκολληθήσεται. προσκολλαω means “to adhere to closely, *be faithfully devoted to, join w. dat.*”<sup>89</sup>, while ακολουθεω means “to follow or accompany someone who takes the lead, *accompany, go along with*”<sup>90</sup>. It is true that Ruth is following Naomi to Judah and that Naomi is leading, but the decisive moment in their relationship, which in Hebrew is expressed by דָּבַק, is clearly left out in the LXX. Orpah leaves, but Ruth follows. Is this everything? Does Ruth ‘only’ follow? Gillis Gerleman argues

<sup>81</sup> Hereafter abbreviated LXX.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Wallis, “דָּבַק”, 84.

<sup>83</sup> Hereafter abbreviated MT.

<sup>84</sup> Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, vol. I (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, 1935), 496.

<sup>85</sup> Rahlfs, *LXX*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> Wolfgang Kraus and Martin Karrer, eds, *Septuaginta Deutsch. Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung* (Stuttgart: Deutscher Bibelgesellschaft, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Kraus/Karrer, *LXX Deutsch*, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Kraus/Karrer, *LXX Deutsch*, 296.

<sup>89</sup> Friedrich W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (BDAG), based on Walter Bauer’s, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, sixth edition, ed. by Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Riechmann and based on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 881.

<sup>90</sup> Danker, *Greek*, 36.

that the use of ἠκολούθησεν in LXX should be interpreted “als Fehlbeschreibung”<sup>91</sup> and supports this with the fact that in Ruth 2:8 and 21 קָבַד is used in MT, and in LXX these passages are translated using a form of κολλαω and not ακολουθεω. Jeremy Schipper thinks that the reason for the different translation might have been the “confusion with a similar sounding form of the Greek word [...]”<sup>92</sup> κολλαω.<sup>93</sup>

The comparison with the LXX showed that the verb קָבַד should not be translated by ‘to follow’, but rather by ‘to cling’, in order to keep its specific meaning as presented before. קָבַד necessarily has to keep its implied literal meaning of gluing/sticking together. Ruth is not only following Naomi, but rather decides “active[ly] [...] to renounce freedom in favor of another being [...]”<sup>94</sup> in favour of Naomi. According to Mieke Bal, a translation that does not express the active and decisive aspect of Ruth’s choice is “easy to evaluate as an instance of censorship [...]”<sup>95</sup>.

In a nutshell, the result of the analysis is that Ruth’s and Orpah’s decisions differ from each other. Orpah leaves for the sake of her future and is not criticised for that, neither by Naomi and Ruth, nor by the author.<sup>96</sup> In contrast with Orpah’s decision, that of Ruth sticks out. The verb קָבַד expresses in a figurative way the change in the relationship of the two women. Ruth actively decides to cling to Naomi. The parallel with Gen 2:24 opens the horizon for several new interpretations which will be mentioned later (#2).

Looking back at the initial question (what does the ‘clinging’ of Ruth mean for the relationship of the two women?), it can be said that Ruth does not decide what is best for her and according to her social environment, but rather commits herself to Naomi, “an aged, hopeless mother-in-law”,<sup>97</sup> or as Phyllis Tribble sums it up, “One female has chosen another female in a world where life depends upon men.”<sup>98</sup> Ruth leaves her country, her people, her God for Naomi and she does it consciously. This conclusion can be drawn from her reflection/explanation/argumentation in v.16-17.

To conclude, I would like to cite Erich Zenger’s appropriate evaluation of Ruth’s action:

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<sup>91</sup> Gillis Gerleman, ed., *Ruth. Das Hohelied*, Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament, vol. XVIII (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1965), 20.

<sup>92</sup> Schipper, *Ruth*, 97.

<sup>93</sup> See also Franco Montanari, ed., *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 70 (ακολουθεω), 1152 (κολλαω) and 1815 (προσκολλαω).

<sup>94</sup> Mieke Bal, “Heroism and Proper Names, Or the Fruits of Analogy”, in *The Feminist Companion to Ruth*, vol. 3, ed. by Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 48.

<sup>95</sup> Bal, “Heroism”, 48.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Bush, *Ruth*, 86.

<sup>97</sup> Hubbard, *Ruth*, 116.

<sup>98</sup> Tribble, “Two women”, 258.

„In Ruths Worten deckt der Erzähler die Perspektive echter Liebe auf: die Liebe fragt nicht, was sie durch ihr Tun selbst erhält (Orpa: ein neues Leben), sondern was sie durch ihr Tun dem anderen tut (in unserem Fall: eine „tote“ Frau im Stich lassen!).“<sup>99</sup>

## 2. ‘But Ruth clung to her’ (Ruth 1:14)

### 2.1 Presentation of a feminist interpretation



‘Ruth and Naomi’ by Philip Hermogenes Calderon<sup>100</sup>

Who are they?

On this picture we see three persons. Two of them are embracing each other and the third person is standing a few steps away from them. She/he is carrying something. Is he/she leaving? How are the three of them related to each other? Are they family, friends, lovers?

Who are they?

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<sup>99</sup> Zenger, *Rut*, 41.

<sup>100</sup> “Philip Hermogenes Calderon - Ruth and Naomi.jpg”, Wikipedia Commons, accessed March 30, 2018, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Philip\\_Hermogenes\\_Calderon\\_-\\_Ruth\\_and\\_Naomi.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Philip_Hermogenes_Calderon_-_Ruth_and_Naomi.jpg).

The title of this picture is ‘Ruth and Naomi’ and it was painted by Philip Hermogenes Calderon. The title does not really answer the questions concerning the identity of the three painted individuals, since it only mentions two names.

Who are they?

I already analysed Ruth 1:14bβ and pointed out especially the ambiguity of the verb רָבַח. In my exegetical analysis I tried to analyse the issue in a ‘objective’<sup>101</sup> way from a linguistic and grammatical viewpoint by using different exegetical tools. On purpose I did not yet give any scholarly opinions or my own personal evaluation. In the following I will give four different interpretations of Ruth 1:14 (רָבַח) and its connection with Gen 2:24. Firstly, the feminist interpretation of Cheryl Exum will be presented.<sup>102</sup> The three other interpretations disagree with Exum’s feminist approach and propose different ideas about how to read and interpret Gen 2:24 and Ruth 1:14 together. Finally, I will conclude with my own evaluation of the issue.

Cheryl Exum starts her article “Is This Naomi?” by referring to Calderon’s picture ‘Ruth and Naomi’. Just as I did, inspired by her, she asks about the identity of the three persons. Who are they? She is mostly concerned with the embracing couple and offers us two possibilities of identifying them: ‘Ruth & Naomi’ or ‘Ruth & Boas’. According to her, both solutions are open to objection. On the one hand, we have to admit that the hug of the two persons has a certain erotic element. How do we explain this, if we assume that the two are ‘Ruth & Naomi’? On the other hand, there is also a third person in the picture and if we assume that the couple shows ‘Ruth & Boas’ and the title is ‘Ruth and Naomi’, then the third person has to be Naomi. This is odd, because there is no biblical scene where Ruth, Naomi and Boas meet. [So is this scene fictive and did it originate in the fantasy of the painter?]<sup>103</sup>

Exum points out in her article that these questions and in general the question of the relationship between Naomi and Ruth in the Book of Ruth can be answered in two different ways. First, it can be regarded from the perspective of a ‘same-sex’ interpretation. It is important to mention that by this Exum does not exclusively refer to a lesbian relationship, but rather to “the strong bond between two women that range from deep and abiding friendship to

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<sup>101</sup> It is not possible to be objective. To a certain degree I am influenced by my own presuppositions and context, but I tried to not judge the issue from the beginning on and rather look at it from a neutral exegetical angle.

<sup>102</sup> It should be mentioned that in different contexts, like in Africa, a homosexual interpretation of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi would not occur at all. The possibility of such an interpretation also depends on the horizon that the culture behind the context offers. We are always influenced by our own presuppositions and by the guidelines of our culture and values. (Cf. Isabel Apawo Phiri, “Ruth”, in *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006), 321.)

<sup>103</sup> Cf. for the whole paragraph J. Cheryl Exum, “Is this Naomi?” in: *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Perspectives on Biblical Women (Gender, Culture, Theory)* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 129-137.



lesbianism.”<sup>104</sup> Second, it can also be interpreted from an ‘opposite-sex’ angle. This perspective tends to result “in a romanticizing of the relationship between Ruth and Boaz.”<sup>105</sup> In this context I would like to highlight one of Exum’s statements: “Where matters sexual are involved, as in the case of Ruth, there is more at stake, and reading tends to become emotionally charged.”<sup>106</sup> The question of Ruth 1:14 is sensitive, because the question of sexuality is involved in the interpretation and sexuality is sensitive. During the following discussion this will become obvious.

Exum gives several arguments for a ‘same-sex’ interpretation in her article:

- Ruth’s **vow** to Naomi<sup>107</sup>
- Ruth’s “**lifelong commitment**”<sup>108</sup>
- Ruth **leaving** of her family and **cleaving** to Naomi (Ruth 1:14/2:11 and Gen 2:24)
 

“The appearance of terminology commonly understood to represent the marriage bond and its use (whether deliberate or not) to describe a bond between women sets the stage for the appropriation of the book for same-sex relationships.”<sup>109</sup>

gives the “relationship its marriage-like quality.”<sup>110</sup>
- **gender roles**<sup>111</sup>

confusing relationships between the three characters<sup>112</sup>

“blurring of sexually defined roles.”<sup>113</sup>

Exum admits that the discussion of a ‘same-sex’ interpretation of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is more present outside the scholarly literature, because of the “scholarly concern with the book’s original meaning or canonical contexts [...]”.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless she accuses scholarship of not being willing/able to see a feminist interpretation due to a “heterosexist bias”.<sup>115</sup> During my research I read several blog articles online which support Exum’s thesis. Furthermore, I found the following campaign:

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<sup>104</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 134.

<sup>105</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 135.

<sup>106</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 137.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Exum, “Naomi”, 137.

<sup>108</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 138.

<sup>109</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 138.

<sup>110</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 145.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Exum, “Naomi”, 168-174.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Exum, “Naomi”, 169.

<sup>113</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 171.

<sup>114</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 140-141.

<sup>115</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 141.



Campaign: 'WouldJesusDiscriminate'<sup>116</sup>

This also underlines her statement about the emotional character of the debate.

To conclude, I would like to use Exum's final evaluation where she points out a "third alternative to the reading in terms of same-sex and opposite-sex relationships [...] By destabilizing our gender categories, the book of Ruth, like Calderon's painting [...], invites readers to collapse the gender distinctions with which they themselves operate. Or at least to examine, and perhaps to reconfigure, them."<sup>117</sup>

## 2.2 Objections and different interpretations of the verse

In the following I will present three interpretations of the connection between Ruth 1:14 and Gen 2:24 that differ from the one proposed by Exum.

### 2.2.1 Scott N. Callaham: "Textual Constraints on Ambiguity in Ruth 1:14"

Scott N. Callaham does not agree with Cheryl Exum. He denies a feminist reading of Ruth 1:14 after having analysed the connection of Gen 2:24 and Ruth 1:14 with the help of Richard Hays's seven points.<sup>118</sup> He sums up his evaluation<sup>119</sup> as follows: "A sexual relationship between Ruth and Naomi does not cohere thematically with the plot of the book, is historically implausible, is absent from the history of interpretation until the dawn of postmodernism, and thus presents an unsatisfactory reading from a text-centric intertextual perspective."<sup>120</sup> Instead of regarding Gen 2:24 as alluding to Ruth and Naomi as a married couple, he suggests that "echoes of Genesis 2:24 gently beckon the reader to recall Ruth's marriage to Mahlon."<sup>121</sup> Callaham

<sup>116</sup> "Ruth loved Naomi as Adam loved Eve", WouldJesusDiscriminate, accessed March 30, 2018, [http://wouldjesusdiscriminate.org/biblical\\_evidence/ruth\\_naomi.html](http://wouldjesusdiscriminate.org/biblical_evidence/ruth_naomi.html).

<sup>117</sup> Exum, "Naomi", 174.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Christopher B. Hays, "Echoes of the Ancient Near East? Intertextuality and the Comparative Study of the Old Testament", in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays*, eds J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing), 35-42.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Scott N. Callaham, "But Ruth Clung to Her: Textual Constraints on Ambiguity in Ruth 1:14", *Tyndale Bulletin* 63 (2012), 191-197.

<sup>120</sup> Callaham, "Ruth", 195.

<sup>121</sup> Callaham, "Ruth", 196.

accuses feminist readings of being influenced by presuppositions and not supported by exegetical findings. I do not want to judge or evaluate his thesis in detail, but I want to raise the question if Callaham himself is not also influenced by his own presuppositions.<sup>122</sup> Is his argument valid?

### 2.2.2 Jon L. Berquist: “Role Dedifferentiation in the Book of Ruth”

In the following the interpretation of Jon L. Berquist will be presented. It will be supported by the arguments of John R. Wilch and Kristin Moen Saxegaard, who agree with Berquist.

#### 2.2.2.1 John R. Wilch

Just like Callaham, John R. Wilch objects to a feminist (or more precisely a lesbian) interpretation of Ruth 1:14. In one of the footnotes of his commentary on the Book of Ruth, he gives a quite emotional negation of any ‘lesbian’ reading of Ruth 1:14bβ and instead alludes to Berquist’s interpretation (Ruth as the son) that will be discussed in the next sub-section.<sup>123</sup>

#### 2.2.2.2 Jon L. Berquist

Jon L. Berquist’s interpretation depends on the theory of ‘Role Dedifferentiation’ “by which persons respond to crisis through adding roles, including roles that would be socially inappropriate in normal times.”<sup>124</sup> He explains this theory with an example from the Second World War, when North American women had to take over jobs “which had previously been male gender-specific [...]”.<sup>125</sup> According to him, this theory fits in the context of Ruth, because she has to react to a crisis (death and famine) which “lead[s] directly to her dedifferentiation.”<sup>126</sup> Ruth does not lose her other role, but rather adds a new one. This is expressed by the verb קָרַב. “When Ruth clings to Naomi, Ruth takes the male role in initiating a relationship of formal commitment, similar to marriage.”<sup>127</sup> Naomi reacts to this by accepting “Ruth as kin, in the form of a son”.<sup>128</sup> Berquist sees in this Ruth’s and Naomi’s attempt to resolve the crisis they are experiencing on an interim basis.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The important point here is not that he is influenced by his own presuppositions, because that is human and a condition we all share, but rather that he does not admit it and only accuses others of it. The history of interpretation is cram-full with male findings and exegesis, which should not make us take it as the only possible way of interpretation. Feminist interpretation is not nonvalid because it did not occur earlier in the history of interpretation: it was simply not allowed and possible yet.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Wilch, *Ruth*, 166 (footnote 191).

<sup>124</sup> Jon L. Berquist, “Role Dedifferentiation in the Book of Ruth”, *JSOT* 57 (1993), 24.

<sup>125</sup> Berquist, “Ruth”, 25.

<sup>126</sup> Berquist, “Ruth”, 26.

<sup>127</sup> Berquist, “Ruth”, 27.

<sup>128</sup> Berquist, “Ruth”, 28.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Berquist, “Ruth”, 28.

### 2.2.2.3 Kristin Moen Saxegaard

Kristin Moen Saxegaard agrees with Berquist and extends his analysis in her article “ ‘More than Seven Sons’. Ruth as Example of the Good Son”.<sup>130</sup> She bases her argumentation on Ruth 4:15, where a woman says to Naomi, “for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.”<sup>131</sup> Moen Saxegaard evaluates the different roles of Ruth by saying that “[w]hilst she is a widow, gleaner, seducer and mother, she is first and foremost the good son of Naomi.”<sup>132</sup>

### 2.2.3 Kirsten Nielsen

As a last scholarly opinion, that of Kirsten Nielsen will be given. She mentions it only briefly in her commentary on the Book of Ruth. When discussing v.14 she points out the connection with Gen 2:24 and proposes that “[s]een in this light Ruth’s gesture is just as crucial for the future as a man who marries.”<sup>133</sup> She furthermore points out that in Gen 2:24 the same word for ‘to leave’ is used as in Ruth 1:16.<sup>134</sup> There Ruth is asking Naomi not to press her to leave. In Gen 2:24 the verb ‘to leave’ refers to leaving mother and father in order to marry. The context of the two verbs is not really the same. The similarity would be much more convincing if Ruth were talking about leaving her family and people in Moab, but this is not the case. Therefore, the use of the term in both Ruth 1:16 and Gen 2:24 cannot be seen as a clear allusion.

## 2.3 Own ideas/evaluation

So who are they?

How should we interpret the picture and especially the connection of Ruth 1:14 and Genesis 2:24? I do not want to give an interpretation of the picture because art lives from its ambiguity. We do not know how the painter meant it and we will never find out. Every spectator adds a new interpretation to the thousands that have already been there. That is lived reception history of art. There are experts who know a great deal about the epoch and the peculiarities of the painter, but is their opinion worth more? Perhaps they are more profound, but they are not worth more. At least that is my point of view.<sup>135</sup>

But the question of the connection between Ruth 1:14 and Gen 2:24 is an exegetical question. We as exegetes have to judge the intertextuality and find an explanation for it.

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. Kristin Moen Saxegaard, “ ‘More than Seven Sons’: Ruth as Example of the Good Son”, *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, 15, vol. 2 (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1080/090183201753599864>, 257-275.

<sup>131</sup> Ruth 4:15. (“Ruth 4. New Revised Standard Version”, BibleGateway, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ruth+4&version=NRSV>)

<sup>132</sup> Saxegaard, “Sons”, 259.

<sup>133</sup> Nielsen, *Ruth*, 48.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Nielsen, *Ruth*, footnote 79.

<sup>135</sup> For me “die Priesterschaft aller Gläubigen” can be applied on several levels. This is one of them.

Callaham tries to do so by using Hay's seven points. He does not sufficiently state his own presuppositions and is noticeably influenced by them (judgement of reception history). Furthermore, his interpretation of the connection with Gen 2:24 as an echo of the marriage with Mahlon is rather unconvincing. Ruth had already married Mahlon and clung to him accordingly. Now he is dead and she decides to go with Naomi and establishes an alternative relationship with her. She clings to her, but what does Mahlon have to do with it? He is not mentioned and there is no evidence that the passage refers to the marriage with him.

Nielsen sees the connection of the two verses in the motive: importance of the event that is happening. So is the purpose of the intertext only a comparison of motives? Would the author then use such an important verse from Genesis to express this? Nielsen's thesis does not convince me either.

What is crucial for the relationship between Ruth and Naomi? Ruth decides differently from her sister-in-law, even though Naomi recommends both to leave and stay in their home country for the sake of their future. Ruth takes the difficult road. She does not choose to return to her kin, under the wings of her family, back to a male that would take care of her. She chooses to go with Naomi, to take care of her. She clings to her and from that moment on she becomes an individual that takes on a new role. As Berquist explains, "[w]hen Ruth clings to Naomi, Ruth takes the male role in initiating a relationship of formal commitment, similar to marriage."<sup>136</sup>

But what is the result of this 'Role Dedifferentiation'? The result is the narrative of Ruth and Naomi, a narrative that breaks with established and common types of relationships, a narrative of two women that stick together and fight together in a male-dominated world, a narrative that inspires and has inspired many women all over the world in all times in terms of friendship, loyalty and love. This narrative has also inspired Exum and many other feminist scholars as well as discussions outside of scholarly literature. I have to agree with the scholars that Exum refers to in her article.<sup>137</sup> I do not think that we can detect evidence for lesbianism in the Book of Ruth, but Exum expresses more than that. She talks about the peculiarity of the relationship between the two women and about strong boundaries, strong friendship, and she has a point.

The narrative of Ruth and Naomi is special and being so allows its audience to interpret it in many different ways. The Bible is alive in our reception. It is there to speak to us and to comfort us. As Irmtraud Fischer puts it at the end of her commentary, "Mögen sich manche

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<sup>136</sup> Berquist, "Ruth", 27.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Exum, "Naomi", 140-141.

Kirchen heute darüber noch entsetzen, so sind sie vielleicht in ein paar Jahrzehnten, wenn die Diskussion dieser Fragen abgeklärter geworden ist, froh darüber, solche Beispielerzählungen geglückten Lebens außerhalb der heterosexuell stereotypisierten Muster des gemeinschaftlichen Lebens zu haben.”<sup>138</sup> And I agree with her. Who are we to decide, to judge how people should understand the Bible, especially when the book itself invites us to be open?<sup>139</sup>

So who are they?

### 3. Ruth’s vow – traces of the covenant and marriage formula?

Every reader of the Bible is influenced by his/her background. The way in which our community uses texts belongs to our cultural and theological background. Jewish readers for example might be influenced by the interpretation of the vow in the Targum, where it is clearly evaluated as a statement of conversion. This interpretation is challenged by the fact that Ruth continues to be called ‘Moabite’ after her statement, as Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky mention in their commentary.<sup>140</sup> Still, as the text is often used in Jewish conversion liturgies, a Jewish reader might be reminded of such a usage when listening to the text.<sup>141</sup> In my environment I experienced that our understanding and interpretation of the vow is also often guided by the practical use of Ruth 1:16-17 in our contexts and communities. Almost every time I tell people about my research, their first reaction is, “I also know a couple that used this verse in their wedding service!” Especially Ruth 1:16(-17) is often selected to verbalise what couples want to promise each other and before God. Several scholars mention this fact in their commentaries, but they deal with it in different ways. Some only hint at the phenomenon without any judgement and several scholars support and reason such a usage, while others clearly express their doubts concerning the coherence between the liturgical use of the text and its original meaning and context.<sup>142</sup> The usage in Judaism (conversion liturgy), as

<sup>138</sup> Fischer, *Rut*, 263.

<sup>139</sup> See also the following comment: “What the narrative’s author intended – to depict a lesbian relationship, to suggest its likelihood or possibility, or to depict only the intense commitment of a devoted daughter-in-law – is open to each reader’s interpretation.” (Alice L. Laffey, and Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, Wisdom Commentary, vol. 8. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017), 43)

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011), 19.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Jennifer L. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth. A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives*, Studies of Personalities of the Old Testament (The University of Carolina Press, 2011), 53.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. the following:

Use is supported	Use is mentioned	Misuse
-Daniel Baer, <i>Ruth. The Message of Restoration and Redemption in the Book of Ruth</i> (Ari’el Press, 2017), 61.66.	-Wünc, <i>Rut</i> , 119-120. -Apawo Phiri, “Ruth”, 321. -Cohn Eskenazi/Frymer-Kensky, <i>Ruth</i> , 18.	-Younger, <i>Ruth</i> , 433. -Koosed, <i>Gleaning Ruth</i> , 62.

indicated, goes back to the interpretation of the passage for example in the Targum. For this thesis I asked myself: why do we use Ruth 1:16-17 in marriage services? Is it possible to use the text in a marriage context? Does the text allow or even ask for such a usage or is it a classic example of eisegesis or, more harshly, violation of the text?

In this chapter I want to analyse Ruth's vow (v.16-17) and search for traces of the covenant and marriage formula within it. Therefore, it is necessary to take also the close context (v.8 ff) into account in order to do justice to the verses as part of a narrative.

### Naomi & Ruth and God's 707

Ruth's, Orpah's and Naomi's situation can be described in one word: hopelessness. Naomi had left her home Israel for the sake of a better future in Moab. She tried to escape hunger and death. Years later she experiences a new crisis, but now in the country of Moab, her former place of refuge. First, her husband dies and then her two sons, the husbands of Ruth and Orpah, die. Naomi and her daughters-in-law are left without husband, children and accordingly without heirs. Tribble sums Naomi's dilemma up very well in saying, "[f]rom wife to widow, from mother to no-mother, this female is stripped of all identity. The security of husband and children, which a male-dominated culture affords its women, is hers no longer. [...] Stranger in a foreign land, this woman is victim of death – and of life."<sup>143</sup> Naomi finds herself in a dead-end situation. She has to re-examine and re-evaluate. And her solution is to go back to her country of origin, back to Israel. Naomi is desperate and clearly expresses that she does not see hope for herself "because it has turned against [her] the hand of Yahweh."<sup>144</sup> But that applies only to her. For her daughters-in-law she has hope. "Go, return; each of you to the house of her

<p>-Anna Maria Cànopi, <i>Sotto le ali del dio di Israele. Lectio divina sul libro di Rut</i> (Milano: Paoline Editoriale Libri, 2004), 17-18.          - André LaCocque, <i>Ruth</i>, A Continental Commentary, transl. by K C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 50.          -Laffey/Leonard-Fleckman, <i>Ruth</i>, 40.          -Wünc, <i>Rut</i>, 119-120.          -Eveline Goodman-Thau, <i>Liebe und Erlösung. Das Buch Ruth</i>. Schibboleth. Forum Jüdische Kulturphilosophie. Studien zu Religion und Moderne, vol. 4 (Münster: LIT, 2006), 62.</p>		
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<sup>143</sup> Tribble, "Two women", 253.

<sup>144</sup> Ruth 1:13.

mother. Yahweh may show loyalty to you as you have done to the dead and me. Yahweh may give to you and find for you a resting place each of you in the house of her husband.”<sup>145</sup> There is a clear contrast between her statement on her own fate and perspective and her evaluation of that of her daughters-in-law.

### Core Testimony and Countertestimony

Speaking in Walter Brueggemann’s terms, it is possible to detect Core Testimony and Countertestimony<sup>146</sup> in Naomi’s speech: Countertestimony when she reflect on herself and Core Testimony regarding the fate of her daughters-in-law. God does not seem to act in favour of Naomi, he is not showing loyalty (רֶסֶק) to her, but she expects him to do so when it comes to Ruth and Orpah. According to Naomi, Ruth and Orpah acted in a loyal way towards their husbands and also towards Naomi. Now she is certain that Yahweh will reward them for this. The Hebrew term רֶסֶק as mentioned in v.8bα is part of the positive adjectives used in the Credo in Ex 34:6-7, which Brueggemann declares to be crucial for indicating Core Testimony.<sup>147</sup> It should furthermore be mentioned that the way God’s love is described in v.8 is rather special because the expected רֶסֶק of God in the future is compared to the loyalty which two humans had shown in the past.<sup>148</sup> And they are not just two humans, but two “female foreigners [that serve] as models for Yahweh.”<sup>149</sup> This again underlines how fixed roles (e.g. concerning gender and ethnicity) are challenged in the Book of Ruth when for example females are mentioned in a way that is normally reserved for men only.<sup>150</sup>

### Two women and no husband

But now back to the main problem of Naomi, Ruth and Orpah. What is it? It is not hunger and death they are fearing at the moment, at least not in the first place. It is rather the lack of husbands and children that bothers them. Accordingly, in v.8-13 the term husband (אִישׁ) occurs four times:

<i>verse</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Husband for x</i>
9αγ	בְּיַת אִישָׁהָ	Daughters-in-law

<sup>145</sup> Ruth 1:8-9.

<sup>146</sup> For an explanation of Brueggemann’s theory see appendix #8.1.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 215-218.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Tribble, “Two women,” 255. See also Marjo Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds. Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990), 221.

<sup>149</sup> Tribble, “Two women”, 255.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. e.g. ‘A son born to Naomi’ (cf. Exum, “Naomi”, 169) and ‘Go, return each of you to the house of her mother’ (Tribble, “Two women”, 254).



11bβ	לְאִנְשֵׁים:	Naomi
12aβ	לְאִישׁ	Naomi
13bα	לְאִישׁ	Daughters-in-law

It is clear that Naomi refers twice to a husband for herself and twice for Ruth and Orpah. The reference to herself is bracketed by the reference to her daughters-in-law. This might have a symbolic meaning. The core of the problem is that Naomi is too old and has no chance of getting a husband herself and having children again. This influences Ruth and Orpah. If Naomi cannot provide children, she cannot give Ruth and Orpah husbands and ultimately not influence or solve their dilemma (lack of husband and heirs), but she can give them freedom. This frames her argumentation. She wants to make it clear that the two have to search for their luck elsewhere.

‘But Ruth clung to her’ - דָּבַק

But her daughters-in-law take different decisions. While Orpah follows Naomi’s advice and leaves, Ruth clings to her. In the preceding analysis I evaluated the importance of the verb דָּבַק. It is clearly not my intention to repeat myself, but I want to highlight the importance of the verb in this context also, since the intertextuality with Gen 2:24 refers us to a passage that unmistakably talks about marriage.<sup>151</sup> Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman argue that the use of דָּבַק in v.14, which Amy-Jill Levine characterises as “the closest physical position a woman takes to another in the scriptures[...]”,<sup>152</sup> is additionally supported by v.16-17.<sup>153</sup> This closeness that is implied in the resemblance to Gen 2:24 makes “the relationship between Naomi and Ruth [...] intimate and covenantal.”<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, even if the act of ‘leaving (mother and father)’ is not referred to directly in Ruth 1:14, but only later in 2:11, there is still the contradiction between clinging and leaving similar to Gen 2:24 mentioned in the closest context. Melanie Köhlmoos detects the term ‘leaving’ in Ruth’s plea to Naomi not to force her to leave in v.15.<sup>155</sup> Accordingly, it can be said that the intertextuality with Gen 2:24 and especially the use of דָּבַק

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Iain M. Duguid, ed., *Esther and Ruth*, Reformed Expository Commentary, A Series (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2005), 142.

<sup>152</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, “Ruth”, in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Know, 1998), 86.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Laffey/Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, 37.

<sup>154</sup> Laffey/Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, 43.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Melanie Köhlmoos, *Ruth*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch, Teilband 9,3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 17.

provide fertile ground for an interpretation of the vow concerning both covenant and marriage.<sup>156</sup>

### Ruth's vow

A second *Leitwort* of the passage, as well as the *Leitwort* 'husband', is the name of Yahweh.

The tetragrammaton is mentioned four times between v.8 and 17:

8b יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד כְּאִשֶּׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעַמְדִּי:

9α יִתֶּן יְהוָה לָכֶם וּמִצָּאֵן מִנוֹחָה אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִיֶּשֶׁה

13bγ כִּי־יִצְאָה בִּי יַד־יְהוָה:

17bα כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יִסְיֶה כִּי הַמָּוֶת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ:

It is possible to create a scheme from the preceding information:

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Yahweh</i>	<i>Husband</i>
9	possibility of חסד	option to get husband
		9αγ בֵּית אִיֶּשֶׁה DiL
		11bβ לְאִנְשִׁים: Naomi
		12aβ לְאִישׁ Naomi
		13bα לְאִישׁ DiL
13	no חסד, but hand against N	lack of husband
14	דבק	'Role Dedifferentiation', marriage allusion Gen 2:24 Ruth = interim husband/son <sup>157</sup>
16-17		marriage allusion?
17	vow before Yahweh	

The issues of the lack of husbands (and what is connected to it), Ruth's Role Dedifferentiation (דבק) and Yahweh's חסד as an indicator of a subsequent life are all interwoven, but how are these ideas linked? What is special about Ruth's vow and how does it function?

Ruth does not want to accept Naomi's advice and argumentation. Her lack of husband and children<sup>158</sup> does not bring her back into the arms of her family, her people, her god(s). In

<sup>156</sup> See also Nielsen, *Ruth*, footnote 79. In this context the argumentation of Nielsen is important (allusion to marriage), but not concerning the evaluation of the relationship.

<sup>157</sup> The term interim husband/son is inspired by Berquist, "Ruth", 28.

<sup>158</sup> In leaving her country of origin Ruth's situation changes immensely. "Her cultural oppression tripled [...] for there she was not only a widow who was childless but also a foreigner." (Apawo Phiri, "Ruth", 320) Her decision

v.14, using the allusion to Gen 2:24, she makes it clear that she will still perform a role in Naomi's life, but a new one as interim kin (son) and she vows this before Naomi (v.16 – 17a) and Yahweh (v.17b). Why is this special, a vow before Yahweh? The vow itself is not something rare or special in the Old Testament, but the conditions are. First and foremost it must be said that "Ruth's oath is unique. She is the only woman who swears an oath for good."<sup>159</sup> This underlines once more the female character of the book. Furthermore, Yael Ziegler points out that "[i]ndeed, biblical marriages to foreigners do not seem to involve conversion or require changing one's identity or citizenship. This makes Ruth's declaration that she intends to embrace Naomi, her people, and her God (1:16) all the more astonishing."<sup>160</sup> As already mentioned several times, Ruth's decision is special, also on a religious level. But what are Ruth's specific/main motives? What leads her – the love for Naomi or the love for God? Did she cling to Naomi, to God or to both? Ruth loves Naomi and accompanies her in order to save her from a future that is still deeply affected by her past.<sup>161</sup> Does her oath also reflect her love for God? Ziegler argues that Ruth can be regarded as an example for every Jew. She performs "human love, friendship, and camaraderie [...]"<sup>162</sup> towards a human and this can of course be projected onto human relationships in general, but also in a second step onto the relationship with God. Accordingly, people can learn from Ruth, who decided to leave her personal interests behind and to cling to Naomi instead, how to build a relationship with God, how to cling to him. Yahweh commits to humans, but the relationship is not a one-way road. Humans also have to fulfil their part of the commitment. Ruth serves as a paragon for "the proper way to serve God".<sup>163</sup>

Furthermore, Ruth uses the tetragrammaton in her oath to Yahweh. This is not as self-evident as we might think. In the oath formula the term Elohim is more likely to be expected than Yahweh. Only in 1 Samuel 20:13, when Jonathan vows his loyalty to David before Yahweh, the tetragrammaton is also used. Ziegler draws a parallel between the two stories by saying that both decisions (Jonathan's decision to be loyal to David and not to his father and Ruth's decision to cling to Naomi instead of returning home) do not seem coherent to us. They

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to go with Naomi was therefore not only a matter of not solving her dilemma 'as easily as Orpah', but she was even willing to widen it. And it was probably not the easiest thing to be a foreigner in Juda. Iain M. Duguid phrases it trenchantly by saying, "[s]he knew she would be about as welcome in Bethlehem as a ham sandwich at a bar mitzvah." (Duguid, *Esther and Ruth*, 142) The change of role (being a foreigner) should not be forgotten.

<sup>159</sup> Laffey/Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, 42.

<sup>160</sup> Ziegler, *Ruth*, 153.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Ziegler, *Ruth*, 155-157.

<sup>162</sup> Ziegler, *Ruth*, 160.

<sup>163</sup> Ziegler, *Ruth*, 161.

both follow a reasoning that lies outside of our understanding.<sup>164</sup> Both act according to their “understanding of what the God of Israel requires of [...]”<sup>165</sup> them. And with their sacrifices they both help to establish the Davidic dynasty.<sup>166</sup> Finally, it should be mentioned that Ruth’s use of the tetragrammaton in v.17 is unique in the entire book.<sup>167</sup> It symbolises the turning point, the crossing over to Naomi’s religion, the total acceptance of Yahweh and “at the same time, a deliberate and conscious rejection of any other god.”<sup>168</sup> Ruth not only chooses Naomi in her vow, but also Yahweh. When we analyse the vow, it is already clear that the term ‘commitment’ pops up quite frequently in the commentaries.<sup>169</sup> The usage of the oath underlines Ruth’s willingness to commit, to Yahweh and to Naomi. It is necessary to keep this in mind, since marriage also has to do with commitment.

To draw a first conclusion, three topics are important in the text: God’s  $\text{YHWH}$ , the lack of husbands/children and the ethnical and especially religious assimilation of Ruth.

Now I will take a closer look at the elements of the vow and possible intertexts.

### Intertextuality

“The closest and most revealing analogy to Ruth’s vow (1:16-17) is that of another foreigner in the Bible who swears loyalty to a Judahite of Bethlehem, namely Ittai the Gittite.”<sup>170</sup> He does so in 2 Samuel 18:19-22:

19 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why are you also coming with us? Go back, and stay with the king; for you are a foreigner, and also an exile from your home. 20 You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, while I go wherever I can? Go back, and take your kinsfolk with you; and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you.” 21 But Ittai answered the king, “As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be.” 22 David said to Ittai, “Go then, march on.” So Ittai the Gittite marched on, with all his men and all the little ones who were with him.

Cohn Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky analyse the similarities and differences between these two stories in their commentary. Both are foreigners and are advised (by Naomi/David) to return and not to follow. Ruth and Ittai do not heed this advice and refuse to listen. They succeed in their rebellion and follow nevertheless. But their stories also differ. While Ruth decides to go

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. Ziegler, *Ruth*, 161-164.

<sup>165</sup> Ziegler, *Ruth*, 164.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Ziegler, *Ruth*, 164.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Ziegler, *Ruth*, 163.

<sup>168</sup> Ziegler, *Ruth*, 163.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. e.g. Baer, *Ruth*, 59 / Duguid, *Esther and Ruth*, 142 / Younger, *Ruth*, 433 / Apawo Phiri, “Ruth”, 321.

<sup>170</sup> Cohn Eskenazi/Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 18.

with Naomi, a woman, being a widow, her social perspective is not as good as Ittai's, since he is about to follow a group of men. Furthermore, Ittai is following a king who might in case of success show his gratitude to Ittai in actions. Ruth can expect nothing like that, her future is insecure.<sup>171</sup> Lastly, Ittai gets an answer to his speech, while Naomi's answer is pure silence.<sup>172</sup> To what extent does this intertext help us? It shows that Ruth committed herself to Naomi as Ittai did to David in a way that seems known in the Old Testament, similar to a covenant. To trace the structures of covenant in Ruth's vow, further intertexts are necessary.

Mark S. Smith offers a concrete analysis of the covenantal structures in Ruth 1:16-17 and a possible way of interpreting them. He also refers to Frymer-Kensky<sup>173</sup> and explains that she mentions 2 Sam 15 and 1 Kings 22:4<sup>174</sup>, 2 Kings 3:7 and 2 Chronic 18:3 as intertexts for Ruth and that there is need for further research, which he is willing to elaborate.<sup>175</sup>

He does so in three steps: first, he explains the intertexts of the passage within and outside the Bible; second, he links the terms covenant and family, and third, he applies his findings to Ruth 1:16-17. In the first part of his analysis he proves that 1 Kings 22:4, 2 Kings 3:7 and other parallels "indicate the considerable extent of the treaty/covenant idiom of shared identity and resources."<sup>176</sup> Secondly, he finds out that there is an overlap between covenant and family language and that "individuals [made] covenants to establish ties across family lines."<sup>177</sup> This proves that a covenant was not only restricted "at the international level [...] covenantal procedures appear operative on various social levels [...]"<sup>178</sup> for example in marriage. Covenant made it possible to widen the family boundaries.<sup>179</sup> In the third part Smith names the similarities between the passages from Kings and Ruth and concludes how the covenant between Ruth and Naomi changed their relationship.<sup>180</sup>

Furthermore, as a few scholars mention, it is possible to see a connection between Ruth 1:16-17 and God's covenantal promise, which will be explained further in the following.<sup>181</sup> Ruth promises Naomi to stay with her in the future. This promise recalls God's promise to the Israelites in exile. Naomi is also in an foreign country and about to return home. Brueggemann

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. Cohn Eskenazi/Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 19.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Cohn Eskenazi/Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 22.

<sup>173</sup> He refers only to her, but he probably means the commentary of Cohn Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky.

<sup>174</sup> 1 Kings 22:4: He said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "I am as you are; my people are your people, my horses are your horses."

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Mark S. Smith, "'Your People Shall Be My People': Family and Covenant in Ruth 1:16-17", in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007), 246.

<sup>176</sup> Smith, "Family and Covenant", 252.

<sup>177</sup> Smith, "Family and Covenant", 253.

<sup>178</sup> Smith, "Family and Covenant", 254.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Smith, "Family and Covenant", 255.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Smith, "Family and Covenant", 255-258.

<sup>181</sup> See a.o. Köhlmoos, *Ruth*, 18. / Baer, *Ruth*, 59. / Goodman-Thau, *Liebe und Erlösung*, 62.

explains that in the time of exile “Israel waits and hopes – in joy, in perplexity, in eager longing, but also in wonderment and near-despair [...]”.<sup>182</sup> On the one hand the ‘old’ promises of Yahweh were repeated by the Israelites (Cf. Ex 2:24; 3:7, 16; 6:3-8, 33:1) and on the other hand Yahweh promised new things.<sup>183</sup> Yahweh not only promises “restoration, rehabilitation, and homecoming for Israel [...]”,<sup>184</sup> but also “utters a very different kind of promise, bespeaking an intimate connection to and solidarity with Israel that is to be expressed as presence: ‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’ ”<sup>185</sup> This promise occurs frequently in the Bible.<sup>186</sup> It seems as if this expression is a kind of *Leitmotiv* of the statements that several prophets made in exile. Brueggemann additionally explains that this very expression guaranteed Israel the presence of Yahweh, no matter where they were and what happened and would happen to them.<sup>187</sup>

“I will be your God and you shall be my people.”

Does this not strongly recall Ruth’s vow to Naomi?

“Your people shall be my people and your God shall be my God.”<sup>188</sup>

Ruth promises stability, assimilation and company to Naomi, and that in every possible situation and no matter what will happen to them. Of course it is not the same formula as used by Yahweh, but it seems to be half of it, an allusion to the formula. Ruth not only promises Naomi presence by using the same formula as Yahweh does when he gives hope in exile, but also brings Yahweh back into the setting. Naomi seems resigned. She does not see hope for herself anymore. Yahweh had left her, abandoned her. His/her loyalty is long gone. He/she does not act in favour of her anymore. Ruth brings back the lost hope into this situation of resignation. By using the formula that had brought back hope into exile, she lightens Naomi’s situation. “I am here for you and I will stay with you. What is yours, will be mine. But Yahweh is also here. He/she is your God and in front of him/her I will promise this.”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology*, 169.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 170.

<sup>184</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology*, 171.

<sup>185</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology*, 171.

<sup>186</sup> Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23 / 11:4 / 24:7 / 30:22 / 31:1 / 31:33 / 32:38; Eze 11:20 / 14:11 / 36:28 / 37:23.27; Zech 8:8; Hos 2:23.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 172-172.

<sup>188</sup> Ruth 1:17.

<sup>189</sup> In Eze 37:23 God states that he/she “will save them from all the apostasies into which they have fallen, and will cleanse them.” From the perspective of the Old Testament Ruth had other gods and was therefore praying ‘to idols’. When she declares Yahweh to be her God and vows to him/her, she is ‘cleansed’. In this understanding Yahweh saved her from idolatry.

The analysis of the intertexts showed that Ruth 1:16-17 includes allusion to covenant. To clarify the connection to marriage, it is necessary to take a closer look at the formula of covenant that was presented above. “I will be your God and you shall be my people.” Is this formula comparable to something? What is it reminiscent of?

#### Ruth’s vow and a Ugaritic parallel

In Ugaritic texts brides and grooms tend to address each other by saying ‘brother’ and ‘sister’. This was for example expressed in the marriage formula: “You be my brother, and I shall be your sister.”<sup>190</sup> It might seem a little bit strange to us that they used these terms for each other, but when taking a look at the Song of Songs we can detect the same tendency within the Old Testament. In Song of Songs 4:9 it says, “You have ravished my, heart, my sister, my bride [...]” and in 8:1 “O that you were like a brother to me [...]”<sup>191</sup> The image was also common and used within the Old Testament. It is furthermore possible to find a similar type of formula in the Book of Hosea. Here the relationship between Yahweh and his people faces a crisis. The marriage between the two has been mistreated. Yahweh considers serious consequences, but in the end “[t]his rehabilitated relationship culminates in a restored marriage, expressed precisely as a wedding vow [...]”<sup>192</sup> First, Yahweh assures that he/she will take Israel (back) as his/her wife and this time forever, and several metaphors to express Yahweh’s love are used (v.19-20).<sup>193</sup> Second, an allusion to the Ugaritic wedding formula is made in v.23 “ ‘You are my people,” and he shall say, “You are my God.’ ”<sup>194</sup> This formula can be decoded as following:

You will be (are) my x; I will be (am) your y

When Ruth vows to Naomi she alludes to the promise of Yahweh and at the same time to the wedding formula (the promise/covenant formula alludes to the marriage formula). “Your people shall be my people and your God shall be my God.” Instead of saying, “You, Naomi, will be x for me and I will be y for you,” she concretises the issue. Her vow not only incorporates a new position of Naomi in her life (you will be this or that for me now), but more concretely the assimilation to Naomi’s surroundings (culture, people, God...). The second part of the marriage formula where it says “I will be your y” is missing, but this makes total sense, since this vow is spoken from the perspective of Ruth, who is the active person and initiates the change of relationship. Now it is up to Naomi to react. Naomi on the contrary does nothing, but is silent.

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<sup>190</sup> Korpel, *Rift*, 226.

<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, Abraham refers to Sarai as his sister in the Book of Genesis.

<sup>192</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology*, 223.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Korpel, *Rift*, 229-230.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Korpel, *Rift*, 230.

As Hans-Georg Wüch remarks, there is no kiss, no hugging, no action at all, but silence.<sup>195</sup> What does Naomi's silence<sup>196</sup> mean? Is she just overwhelmed by Ruth's vow and her stunning willingness to commit?<sup>197</sup> André LaCocque states that "[s]ilence alone is the appropriate attitude in the face of such a sacrifice."<sup>198</sup> But does Naomi agree to Ruth's terms? Does she maybe add her part of the vow silently?<sup>199</sup> We simply do not know. Like Ruth in that situation, we have to live with Naomi's silence that "creates a tension in the story [...]"<sup>200</sup> and imagine what it might have meant. What we know for sure is that she does not contradict Ruth. No objection is to a certain degree a silent approval.

So, all in all Ruth restores Naomi's hopes for the future and secures her existence in alluding to God's promise and the marriage vow. She does all this in front of Yahweh using an oath. The NBV (Nieuwe Bijbel Vertaling) translates v.17b as following: "De Heer is mijn getuige: alleen de dood zal mij van u scheiden!"<sup>201</sup> This can be translated as: "The Lord is my witness: only death can separate you from me!" This translation is not literal, but underlines the allusion to the marriage formula. When people marry in church, they want to have God as their witness. In our case God is also Ruth's witness.

### Conclusion/Summary

It might be helpful to sum up all the given arguments for the covenantal structure and marriage allusion in Ruth 1:16-17:

- דָּבַק, closeness and covenant commitment
- the oath to Yahweh/Naomi as a form of commitment
- intertextuality with the covenantal formulas in 2 Sam 15, 1 Kings 22:4, 2 Kings 3:4 and 2 Chron 18:3
- covenant and treaty structure combined with family bonds
- covenantal structure similar to Jer 30:22 and other texts
- allusion to the Ugaritic marriage formula

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<sup>195</sup> Cf. Wüch, *Rut*, 124.

<sup>196</sup> Ancient manuscripts support the idea of silence after v.17 (space left open) (cf. for the whole paragraph Korpel, *Ruth*, 79-81).

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Apawo Phiri, "Ruth", 321.

<sup>198</sup> LaCocque, *Ruth*, 54.

<sup>199</sup> Of course she does not assimilate to Ruth's god(s) and people, but she takes Ruth as her kin.

<sup>200</sup> Nielsen, *Ruth*, 50.

<sup>201</sup> "Ruth 1. Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling", debijbel.nl, accessed May 28, 2018, <https://www.debijbel.nl/bijbel/NBV/Ruth-1>.



How can we now answer our question? Are there traces of the covenant and marriage formula in Ruth's vow that might have caused the usage of the passage in weddings in the past and present? The answer must be 'yes'.

Ruth and Naomi experience a lack of husbands and children and therefore a lack of perspective and future. This is parallel to the lack of Yahweh and his  $\text{דסן}$  that especially Naomi seems to experience. In the form of Core Testimony the hope for Ruth and Orpah is formulated. Yahweh's  $\text{דסן}$  will be with them. Ruth does not accept this and clings to Naomi using an allusion to Gen 2:24. Her Role Dedifferentiation follows and makes her Naomi's responsible kin (son, or even husband?<sup>202</sup>). And she elaborates this further in her vow. The vow itself echoes God's promise to the Israelites in exile to remind Naomi of the fact that not only Ruth will be there, but also Yahweh is there for her and has not left, and echoes, too, one half of the marriage formula that we find in Ugaritic texts as well as in the Old Testament. The main problem (lack of husband/son) is solved by Ruth when she clings to Naomi and also by Yahweh. Ruth alludes to Yahweh who is the husband of Israel. Ruth and Naomi are lacking husbands and simultaneously they are lacking the presence of God, the husband of Israel. Both will return to them as Ruth takes the lead and acts.

One question still remains: Is the Book of Ruth alluding to marriage? In German we have the nice and in this context applicable expression 'jein', which is a mixture of yes and no (ja + nein = jein). Ruth is not marrying Naomi and her vow is one-sided, which distinguishes it from the use of the verse in wedding liturgies, where it is made from both sides, wife and husband.<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, Naomi's and Ruth's situation differs from the one of bride and groom.<sup>204</sup> They are in an existential crisis in which Ruth decides to take the difficult road and establishes a new form of cohabitation/living together. When she does this, she phrases it in a way that alludes to the covenant and marriage formula. That is probably the reason why couples want to use this verse. They want to express loyalty to their partners as Ruth does. Certainly they do not want to change their role nor necessarily their religion as Ruth did, but several motives overlap: lifelong commitment, loyalty, love, friendship, companionship, and so on.<sup>205</sup> The similar intention and the allusion to the covenant (marriage is also a covenant) and marriage formula might have been and still are the reason for the usage of the text in marriage services.

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<sup>202</sup> It is also possible to see Ruth in the role of the husband, since her act of 'clinging' is linked to "Genesis 2:24 to describe the bond that exists in marriage." (Cf. Duguid, *Esther and Ruth*, 142.) See also Köhlmoos, *Ruth*, 18.

<sup>203</sup> This is at least the case in a modern interpretation. It might have been different in more patriarchal times. See also Fischer, *Rut*, 148.

<sup>204</sup> Both cases also refer to bride/bride and groom/groom couples.

<sup>205</sup> Koosed asks if these words are not actually too much for lovers, as they express a strong assimilation and commitment. This is an interesting thought. (Cf. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 62.)

Ruth touches people. With her stunning words she delivers what we sometimes lack words for. She expresses our feelings and speaks from the heart of readers in past and present.

The next chapter will show how much Ruth influenced different readers during the reception history and served/serves as a basis for several forms of living and relationships.

## 4. A reception-historical outlook: Ruth & Naomi in art, film and literature

Chapter 4 is fully devoted to the reception history of the Book of Ruth and more specifically of Ruth 1:14-17/18. Ruth & Naomi and their special relationship seem to inspire artists, writers, photographers and moviemakers. It would therefore not be difficult to write an entire thesis about the reception history of the passage only. I had to choose from a high variety of options and decided to give a short insight into artistic adaptation, two historical approaches of feminist lifestyles, a novel/movie that was inspired by Ruth 1:16 and something that does not, or not in the first place, have to do with ‘feminism’. In chapter #4.4 I will present “Ruth seen in a different light”.<sup>206</sup> But beforehand I want to give an insight into the methodology of reception history and thereby reason and support my approach of regarding the reception history of the text under discussion as an important, not to say essential, part of my analysis.

### 4.1 Bridging gaps – between the historical-critical analysis of the text and the recipient

When I started my work on the Book of Ruth, the first commentary that caught my attention was that of Irmtraud Fischer. In one chapter she offers a short overview of the reception history of the Book of Ruth, just long enough to refer the interested reader to several echoes in art, literature, movie and history.<sup>207</sup> I was immediately interested and used her bibliography as a starting point of my research, wanting to know what Ruth did to people, how she moved, inspired, equipped them. My question was more and more “What Can a Text Do?”<sup>208</sup>, in addition to the search for historical questions and their “historical answers”<sup>209</sup>. William J. Lyons believes that there is a fundamental “schism between historical criticism and postmodern interpretation [...]”<sup>210</sup> While one side accuses the other of believing that they have the key to

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<sup>206</sup> “Het idee”, [ruthineenanderlicht.nl](http://www.ruthineenanderlicht.nl), accessed May 28, 2018, <http://www.ruthineenanderlicht.nl>.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, 111-113.

<sup>208</sup> Brennan Breed, “What Can a Text Do? Reception History as an Ethology of the Biblical Text”, in *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*, LHBOTS 615, ed. E. England and W.J. Lyons, 95-109, London/New York: T&T Clark, 2015.

<sup>209</sup> William John Lyons, “Hope for a Troubled Discipline? Contributions to New Testament Studies from Reception History,” in *JSNT* 33/2 (2010), 210.

<sup>210</sup> Lyons, “Hope”, 208.

truth in their hands, the other defends itself by persisting in searching for “historical answers”<sup>211</sup> only. How to overcome this ‘schism’, this canyon? How to start a conversation? Lyons argues that on the one hand there are several reasons for investigating issues concerning the New Testament such as “its importance to religious communities, its relevance to secularists responding to fundamentalism, and its significance within Western culture [...],”<sup>212</sup> but unfortunately on the other hand “none gives much succour to traditional historical critics.”<sup>213</sup> Reception history on the contrary enables us to start a conversation between different issues, to provide better answers and finally also to give us “real hope”<sup>214, 215</sup> It does so, because it introduces an insight into the way biblical figures and stories are actually perceived by recipients and form their cultural understanding, which historical-critical analysis often fails to describe.<sup>216</sup> How can we start such a conversation? How should we approach reception history? How can historical-critical analysis be improved?

Brennan Breed gives an answer in his article “What Can a Text Do? Reception History as an Ethology of the Biblical Text”.<sup>217</sup> He is of the opinion that reception history “offers new compelling points of view on the nature of biblical texts, the function of contexts, and the concept of meaning.”<sup>218</sup> By citing John Barton’s fear he makes it clear that while we work on reception history, the historical setting of the text should not be left out, being a discipline in conversation as we remember from Lyons.<sup>219</sup> Still, the importance of reception history should not be underestimated.<sup>220</sup> Helpful for any reception-historical approach is the discipline of ‘Ethology’, which normally concerns the study of animals. “In ethological terms, a thing is defined by what it does – or what it *can do* – not by what it should be, or by what it used to look like.”<sup>221</sup> Applying this discipline to our case, biblical texts, we are able to analyse them “ ‘in the wild’ in all of its diverse processual forms and activities.”<sup>222</sup> The world is changing and has changed in the past, therefore the way we perceive ideas and interpret texts also varies. Reception history equips researchers to detect and explain these variations which occur “through time and space in response to surrounding environments.”<sup>223</sup> Applied to the Book of

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<sup>211</sup> Lyons, “Hope”, 210.

<sup>212</sup> Lyons, “Hope”, 216.

<sup>213</sup> Lyons, “Hope”, 216.

<sup>214</sup> Lyons, “Hope”, 217.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Lyons, “Hope”, 210.217.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Lyons, “Hope”, 217.

<sup>217</sup> Breed, “Text”, 95-109.

<sup>218</sup> Breed, “Text”, 95.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Breed, “Text”, 95-96 / Lyons, 210.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Breed, “Text”, 97.

<sup>221</sup> Breed, “Text”, 98.

<sup>222</sup> Breed, “Text”, 100.

<sup>223</sup> Breed, “Text”, 102.

Ruth, reception history can discuss, among other issues, the influence of the rise of feminism on the interpretation of the relationship of Naomi and Ruth.

#### 4.2 A manner of interpretation – Ruth & Naomi in art

Ruth and Naomi are favourite motives for artists. They find many different ways to express their story, personalities and fate, but mostly we cannot be sure what the artist actually meant and what is in the painting that was perhaps unintentional. In chapter #2 Calderon's picture 'Ruth and Naomi'<sup>224</sup> was presented and its ambiguity was highlighted. In this subchapter I will present a few other paintings in order to give a glimpse into the variety of the artistic reception history of the story or more precisely of the two women. I am not an expert when it comes to art and, as I said, I think that it is also the purpose of art to be left without final judgement. This is the reason why I will only shortly present some paintings. The interpretation lies, as we say in German, 'im Auge des Betrachters'<sup>225</sup> (in the eye of the beholder).



“Whither Thou Goest (Ruth and Naomi)” by Sandy Freckleton Gagon<sup>226</sup>

The picture “Whither Thou Goest (Ruth and Naomi)” is painted by Sandy Freckleton Gagon. She has an art blog where she not only gives insight into her work, but also explains what drove

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. “Philip Hermogenes Calderon - Ruth and Naomi.jpg”, Wikipedia Commons, accessed March 30, 2018, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Philip\\_Hermogenes\\_Calderon\\_-\\_Ruth\\_and\\_Naomi.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Philip_Hermogenes_Calderon_-_Ruth_and_Naomi.jpg).

<sup>225</sup> \*Betrachterin.

<sup>226</sup> “Whither Thou Goest (Ruth and Naomi)”, Sandyfreckletongagonartblog, accessed June 6, 2018, <https://sandyfreckletongagonartblog.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/2-ruth-and-naomi.jpg>.

her to create her paintings. In the rubric “Paint and process” she also explains the intention behind the portrait of Ruth and Naomi. Naomi and Ruth are dressed in the same way, but their age difference is very much visible. While Ruth seems young, strong and protective, Naomi appears old, weak and fragile next to her. Ruth embraces Naomi and shields her. Ruth and the stick give Naomi stability. When we look at this picture, it does not seem as if Ruth had any chance to go back to her people and her god(s). We rather get the impression that Naomi really needs Ruth. Would she make it if Ruth left her? It does not seem like it. Seen in this light, leaving Naomi as Orpah did would have been rather cruel, not to say ruthless, of Ruth and have meant Naomi’s ruin.

This is not quite the explanation or reasoning the painter herself gives. She reconstructs how she developed the painting, retells the story and gives it a Christological interpretation.<sup>227</sup> Nevertheless, this painting offers us a strong Ruth and a vulnerable Naomi.

I could not get permission to show the following picture discussed, so I must refer the reader to a website where it accessible.<sup>228</sup>

The next painting by Brandon Buehring is also titled “Ruth and Naomi”, but shows us a totally different image. Both seem to be the same age and it is therefore not certain who is who. They are embracing each other and it seems as if the left one hides her face in the embrace, while the right one looks boldly straight ahead. Is she looking into the future? Is that Ruth?



‘Ruth and Naomi’ by Jakob Steinhardt<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Cf. “Whither Thou Goest (Ruth and Naomi). Painting and process”, Sandyfreckletongagonartblog, accessed June 6, 2018, <https://sandyfreckletongagonartblog.wordpress.com/page/2/>.

<sup>228</sup> “Brandon Buehring - Ruth and Naomi”, Qspirit, accessed June 6, 2018, <https://1.bp.blogspot.com/5q7nYwyGVAE/VnWovmipebI/AAAAAAAAAjU0/uN7LGrER2r4/s1600/Buehring%C3%9C+Ruth+and+Naomi.jpg>.

<sup>229</sup> Jakob Steinhardt, *Ruth and Naomi*. Woodcut, 1965. Accession number B09.1623. Exhibition: Jakob’s Dream: Steinhardt in Prints, Drawings, and Paintings, Israel Museum, 01/12/2010-05/03/2011. © Steinhardt Bar-On family, accessed June 21, 2018. <http://museum.imj.org.il/imagine/collections/AZSearch.asp?let=S&artist=Steinhardt,%20Jakob,%20Israeli,%20bo>.

The last picture is also in black and white like the previous one, but again shows a different interpretation. Jakob Steinhardt uses simple ways to show who is who in the picture. Naomi is a little taller than Ruth and it seems as if Ruth obeys her. She also has wrinkles, which makes her older and therefore unmistakably Naomi. Both regard each other warmly. Ruth's regard is telling us that she loves, respects and obeys her mother-in-law, while we can see the kind feelings of a mother in Naomi's regard. To underline this, her hand is clasped in a friendly way on Ruth's shoulder.

In this quick overview of the reception history in art, it becomes visible that there are as many ways to depict Ruth and Naomi as there are to interpret their relationship. It is up to the recipient to judge and to get inspired.

### 4.3 Females support females

In the following two subsections feminist lifestyles will be presented and examined on the basis of the Book of Ruth, and the novel and movie 'Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe' will be introduced as an example of the reception of Ruth 1:16 in fiction and literature.

#### 4.3.1 'Boston Marriages' and 'Affidamento' – feminist lifestyles as a conscious choice

In the following subsection I would like to present two lifestyles which work genuinely to the principle 'females support females'. First, the historical phenomenon of the 'Boston Marriages' will be introduced, followed by the idea of 'Affidamento'. And in a second step both lifestyles will be evaluated according to their similarities or dissimilarities to the Book of Ruth. For the evaluation of 'Affidamento' an article by Irmtraud Fischer which links the concept and the Book of Ruth with each other will be used.

##### 4.3.1.1 'Boston Marriages' or when female devotion was still socially accepted

'Boston Marriages', what is that? It is a special relationship between women that occurred in the United States of America in the nineteenth century.<sup>230</sup> What does relationship mean? What kind of relationship? Kathleen A. Brehony states in her article "Coming to Consciousness: Some Reflections on the Boston Marriages",<sup>231</sup> which is part of the book *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians*, that our language in general lacks words to express variety in all kinds of relationships. This makes it difficult for

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<sup>230</sup> Cf. Lillian Faderman, "Nineteenth-Century Boston Marriages as a Possible Lesson for Today", in *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians*, edited by Esther D. Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brehony (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 29.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Kathleen A. Brehony, "Coming to Consciousness: Some Reflections on the Boston Marriages", in *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians*, edited by Esther D. Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brehony (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 19-26.

us to grasp and express relationships.<sup>232</sup> A ‘Boston Marriage’ is a special relationship, as I said, but what else characterises it? In the same book Lillian Faderman defines it as following: “These women were usually feminists and almost always career women, or otherwise financially independent of men, and they tended to live in couples, in long-term, devoted relationships [...] they not only shared a home together, but they also had mutual friends, they vacationed together [...]”<sup>233</sup> These two women lived “usually monogamous[ly]”<sup>234</sup> in a marriage-like constellation. Before the term ‘Boston Marriages’ was used, strong female relationships were labelled with the name ‘romantic friendship’, “which dates back at least to the Renaissance”.<sup>235</sup> From our twenty-first-century point of view we immediately tend to ask the questions: “And were they sexual? Were they lesbians? Were they gay?” We have to be careful because by doing so we are impressing our own language on ‘ancient’ phenomena. The term ‘lesbian’ for instance was not established until the beginning of the twentieth century with the rise of sexological theories.<sup>236</sup> Regardless of the fact that terms like ‘lesbianism’ did not exist yet, it is difficult to answer the question of the potential sexual factor of the relationships because of the different perception of sexuality at that time. Therefore, it is helpful to think in terms of a pre- and a post-sexological understanding. Before Freud and others changed the perception of sexuality, the common notion was that woman in general had “no autonomous sexual drive – they merely did their duties to their conjugal bed and procreation.”<sup>237</sup> A woman without a husband was asexual, ergo a woman living with a woman was not suspected of any sexual activity at all.<sup>238</sup> ‘Boston Marriages’ and ‘romantic friendships’ were even admired and encouraged by men.<sup>239</sup> Society appreciated the intense friendships between women because it was considered a good training of interhuman relations that served the – for economic reasons – inevitable reality of marriage. Sooner or later every women needed to marry in order to sustain a good life, and until then she could ‘fool around’ with her female friends. Pre-marital relations with males, in contrast, would have influenced their purity negatively, but there was no harm in strong female friendships.<sup>240</sup> With Freud and others this changed drastically. Once society had put on the “sexualized

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. Brehony, “Coming to Consciousness”, 21-22.

<sup>233</sup> Faderman, “Boston”, 29.

<sup>234</sup>Theresa Theophano, “Boston Marriages”, *gltqarchive*, 2015, [http://www.gltqarchive.com/ssh/boston\\_marriages\\_S.pdf](http://www.gltqarchive.com/ssh/boston_marriages_S.pdf), 1.

<sup>235</sup> Faderman, “Boston”, 30.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Faderman, “Boston”, 30.35.

<sup>237</sup> Faderman, “Boston”, 31.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Faderman, “Boston”, 33.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. Faderman, “Boston”, 30.34.

<sup>240</sup>Cf. Faderman, “Boston”, 32-33.

lens”,<sup>241</sup> there was no such thing as innocent female devotion any more. As a consequence everyone was necessarily suspected of being sexual<sup>242</sup> and therefore “[t]erms such as ‘romantic friendship’ and ‘Boston marriage’ slipped out of the language to be replaced by terms such as ‘perversion’, ‘inversion’, ‘homosexuality’, and ‘lesbianism’.”<sup>243</sup> L. Faderman states that this development makes it impossible for society to continue to believe in an asexual relationship between women, as was so natural back in the nineteenth century.<sup>244</sup> Most probably some of these relationships were sexual, but not necessarily all of them.<sup>245</sup> Our current vocabulary lacks words for relationships such as ‘Boston Marriages’ and ‘romantic friendship’. By banning the idea of innocence, we stigmatise female relationships, focus only on sexual parameters and forget what else a relationship can offer people.<sup>246</sup> To escape this dilemma the author proposes at the end of her article that “it may be anachronistic to apply the term ‘lesbian’ to women in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Boston marriages who had never heard that term, to call contemporary committed relationships that have ceased to be (or never were) sexual ‘neo-Boston marriages’ has better justification.”<sup>247</sup>

#### 4.3.1.2 ‘Affidamento’ or clinging for good

The book *Wie weibliche Freiheit entsteht. Eine neue politischer Praxis* is written by various women who run a female bookstore in Milan and describes “ein Stück Geschichte der Frauenbewegung, dargestellt an den Ideen, Theorien und Aktivitäten einiger Frauengruppen in Mailand von 1966 bis heute [...]”.<sup>248</sup> It presents the concept of ‘Affidamento’, whose originators the women do not claim to be. It existed before. They merely brought it to light<sup>249</sup> and named it ‘Affidamento’, which can be translated as ‘to confide/to entrust oneself to’.<sup>250</sup> “In der Praxis bedeutet das, daß eine Frau, die sich eine soziale Existenz verschaffen möchte, sich eine andere Frau, welche für sie ein ‚Mehr‘ verkörpert, als Vermittlungsinstanz zwischen sich und der Welt sucht. Anders als in jeder Politik der Emanzipation, wo die Frau sich an männliche Vermittlungsinstanzen wendet.”<sup>251</sup> Interesting is that Ruth and Naomi are named as biblical

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<sup>241</sup> Jennie Rothenberg Gritz citing Peggy Wishart, “But Were They Gay? The Mystery of Same-Sex Love in the 19th Century”, *The Atlantic*, September 7, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/09/but-were-they-gay-the-mystery-of-same-sex-love-in-the-19th-century/262117/>.

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Faderman, “Boston”, 36.

<sup>243</sup> Faderman, “Boston”, 35.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Faderman, “Boston”, 35.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Faderman, “Boston”, 31.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Faderman, “Boston”, 37.

<sup>247</sup> Faderman, “Boston”, 40.

<sup>248</sup> Libreria Delle Donne Di Milano, ed., *Wie Weibliche Freiheit Entsteht: Eine Neue Politische Praxis* (Berlin: Orlando-Frauenverlag, 1989), 9.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 141.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 19.

<sup>251</sup> LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 19 (Anm. d. Ü.).



pioneers of the concept. They, among other women in history, had chosen a specific type of relationship between women and serve as role models.<sup>252</sup> ‘Affidamento’ must be established “aus Notwendigkeit, aus Berechnung, aus Liebe [...]”<sup>253</sup> and is a significant factor for a women in order to accomplish their purpose in society.<sup>254</sup>

#### 4.3.1.3 Ruth & Naomi – modern concepts and an ancient narrative

‘Affidamento’ and ‘Boston Marriages’ are two concepts established in the last two centuries, while the story of Ruth and Naomi is ‘slightly’ older than that. Of course it would be anachronistic fully to apply these concepts to the relationship of the two women, but it must be admitted that the earlier reception history did not really permit women to establish concepts like these. It can therefore be said that women had to wait centuries in order to interpret the narrative freely, get inspired by it and create ideas like ‘Affidamento’, which was also influenced by the ‘Boston Marriages’.<sup>255</sup>

In her article “Affidamento in einer Patriarchalen Gesellschaft. Frauenbeziehungen im Buch Rut”, Irmtraud Fischer asks “wieweit Frauenbeziehungen im Buch Rut tatsächlich die Form des Affidamento annehmen.”<sup>256</sup> Already in her introduction she points to a crucial distinction between Ruth’s and Naomi’s relationship and the idea of ‘Affidamento’. The two women do not liberate themselves from their male-dominated system. On the contrary, they find a solution for their problem(s) which is deeply rooted within it. They do act “unkonventionell, aber nicht revolutionär”.<sup>257</sup> ‘Affidamento’, as explained above, only extends to women as helpers and not to males.<sup>258</sup> Still, there are traces of ‘Affidamento’ among the different female relationships within the book which Fischer structures into four categories. For my purpose only two of these are relevant: ‘Affidamento’ in the relationship between Naomi and her daughters-in-law and more concretely between her and Ruth.

When Naomi selflessly encourages her daughters-in-law to return to their families in order to reincorporate themselves into the traditional system, Orpah decides to leave and Ruth to stay. Fischer declares this decision of Ruth to be special because clinging to a woman instead of a man who guarantees survival and procreation goes against Ruth’s cultural background and

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<sup>252</sup> Cf. LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 19.21.

<sup>253</sup> LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 141.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 26.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 24.

<sup>256</sup> Irmtraud Fischer, “Affidamento in einer patriarchalen Gesellschaft. Frauenbeziehungen im Buch Rut”, in *Paris – Milano – Graz: Feministische Projekte in Entwicklung*, Reihe Dokumentation, Bd. 4, edited by Universität Graz. Projektgruppe Interdisziplinäre Frauenstudien (Wien: Wiener Frauenverlag, 1991), 111.

<sup>257</sup> Fischer, “Affidamento”, 113.

<sup>258</sup> Cf. LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 19.

is clearly a form of ‘Affidamento’.<sup>259</sup> When it comes to the specific relationship between Ruth and Naomi, Fischer points out that both women work together to achieve their common goal in contributing the best they can. Ruth on the strength of her youth is able to transform the thoughtful plans of her sharp mother-in-law. In doing so they do not act and think in conventional ways, but depart from the cultural framework once again when ‘seducing’ and convincing Boas. Together they succeed.<sup>260</sup> In her conclusion the author adds to her thesis from the beginning that the two women are “keine Aussteigerinnen, die sich auf eine utopische Frauenwelt zurückziehen, sondern sie setzten in ihrer ethisch konsequenten Lebenshaltung ihre eigenen Maßstäbe an die patriarchale Gesellschaft an und überwinden sie – nicht kämpferisch, sondern logisch, weil einsichtig lebensfördernd.”<sup>261</sup>

I agree with Fischer’s analysis of the situation, but want to emphasise one more point. While ‘Affidamento’ must be established “aus Notwendigkeit, aus Berechnung, aus Liebe [...]”<sup>262</sup> as already mentioned before, Ruth’s action is mainly influenced (or even fully determined) by love. If she had acted according to the other two principles, she would have returned with Orpah. She does not cling to Naomi in order to achieve her life goal(s), but because she did not want to leave Naomi alone. Her action is selfless.

When it comes to the evaluation of what we learned about the ‘Boston Marriages’, it is possible to see similar tendencies as detected pre-/post-Freud and others. This is illustrated by the following three scholarly statements, which represent different stages of the development:

Thaddäus Antonius Dereser (1827)	J. Cheryl Exum (1996)	John R. Wilch (2006)
“*Ruth will Glück und Unglück mit Noemi theilen. Ein schönes Bild der Freundschaft, dem nur jenes gleichkommt, welches die Freundschaft zwischen David und Jonathan darstellt. ** Aus Liebe zu ihrer Freundin [...]” <sup>263</sup>	“Under the category of same-sex relations, I am concerned not simply with sexual orientation but with accounts of the strong bond between two women that range from deep and abiding friendship to lesbianism.” <sup>264</sup>	“Ruth’s attachment to Naomi in no way hints at lesbianism [...]. Likewise, there is no homosexuality in 2 Sam 20:2 [...], nor in the attachment between David and Jonathan [...]” <sup>265</sup>

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Fischer, “Affidamento”, 113-117.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. Fischer, “Affidamento”, 117-122.

<sup>261</sup> Fischer, “Affidamento”, 125.

<sup>262</sup> LDDDM, *Freiheit*, 141.

<sup>263</sup> Thaddäus Antonius Dereser, *Die Heilige Schrift des alten Testaments II/1* (Frankfurt: Franz Barrentrapp, 1827), 258.

<sup>264</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 134.

<sup>265</sup> Wilch, *Ruth*, 166 (footnote 191).

Thaddäus Antonius Dereser interpreted the Book of Ruth at the beginning of the nineteenth century and saw no harm in calling the special relationship between Ruth and Naomi “[e]in schönes Bild der Freundschaft”,<sup>266</sup> compared it to the friendship between David and Jonathan and defined Ruth’s motive to follow her mother-in-law simply as “Liebe”<sup>267</sup>. More than hundred years later Cheryl Exum offers an interpretation that according to her can “range from deep and abiding friendship to lesbianism”.<sup>268</sup> Ten years later the quite conservative scholar Wilch seems to hear/read only the word ‘lesbianism’ and denies in his footnote any form of homosexuality in both stories (Ruth & Naomi and Jonathan & David). Of course he is not reacting to Exum in particular, but his attitude is remarkable. Instead of calling the relationship ‘friendship’ or ‘love’ as Dereser did, he simply labels it with the impersonal, cold and featureless description “attachment”<sup>269</sup>. Does he not dare to use the word ‘friendship’, ‘devotion’ or ‘love’ because the terms female love, friendship and devotion already come too close to the term lesbianism which he wants to strongly disagree with in this case? Is he so angry about a feminist interpretation that detects lesbianism in the Book of Ruth that he is not able to differentiate anymore?

Female devotion is not necessarily lesbianism and not every feminist scholar regards Ruth and Naomi as a lesbian couple.<sup>270</sup> I feel that this must be said once and for all and clearly. Just as the lesbian couple interpretation does not do justice to the text, an ‘attachment’ interpretation does not either. It should be possible to describe the relationship of Ruth and Naomi from a feminist point of view without being accused of eisegesis. It is not right to wrest the Book of Ruth from feminist hands, because the book itself questions conventional ideas and concepts, as we have seen enough already, and therefore belongs in the hands of women and feminists just as much as it belongs in the hands of every other reader of the Bible.<sup>271</sup>

#### 4.3.2 ‘Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe’ or how Ruth saves Ruth<sup>272</sup>

I was 12 or maybe even 10 years old when I watched ‘Fried Green Tomatoes’<sup>273</sup> for the first time. Even though I was very young, too young to grasp most of the movie’s many messages, I still liked the movie a lot. I was moved by the characters and their fate, by the strength of the

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<sup>266</sup> Dereser, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 258.

<sup>267</sup> Dereser, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 258.

<sup>268</sup> Exum, “Naomi”, 134.

<sup>269</sup> Wilch, *Ruth*, 166 (footnote 191).

<sup>270</sup> See also Laffey/Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, 41.

<sup>271</sup> It is important to mention at this point that not all the commentaries from nowadays which are not feminist propose such an ‘attachment’ reading or something similar. Many commentators like Schipper and Zenger show the ambiguity in the relationship between the two women and mention feminist ideas without judgement.

<sup>272</sup> For a summary of the book see #8 appendix.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Fannie Flagg, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, DVD, directed by Jon Avnet (USA, 1991).

story and by its emotions. Often children are very conscious of emotions and do not care about all the reasoning behind them. It was probably not important for me how the relationship between Ruth and Idgie should be labelled, I just enjoyed their jokes and togetherness. This is of course subjective memory and speculation, but I am sure that I remembered this movie as special and good. During my research for this thesis I came across the movie once more in an article about the reception history of *Ruth* 1 and honestly I was surprised. What did the movie say about the Book of Ruth? I did not remember any connection, nor did my family. So I watched the movie again and there it was: the clear allusion to Ruth 1:16. Surprisingly, it was not just indicated, but even positioned in the key scene, the climax of the story, the turning point. This is the reason why I choose to dedicate a subsection to this story. In the following I want to describe more closely the use of Ruth 1:16 in the book and the movie. The main concern of my analysis is the relationship between Idgie and Ruth.

What is meant by the title ‘How Ruth saves Ruth’? When my classmates proofread my thesis proposal they told me that I had made a mistake in my table of contents: instead of ‘Ruth saves Naomi’ I had written ‘Ruth saves Ruth’. I assured them that I had done this on purpose. But why? In my introduction I already committed something of a spoiler. The allusion to the Book of Ruth in the novel marks the turning point of the story, but I will analyse the relationship between Idgie and Ruth from the beginning and reveal the reason for the title later.

At the beginning of the novel Idgie loses her beloved brother Buddy. This breaks her heart and spirit. Ninny states that “she was never the same after that, not until she met Ruth, then she started getting back to her old self.”<sup>274</sup> When Idgie met Ruth she fall in love with her. So much so that her mother says that she believes Idgie would do anything for Ruth,<sup>275</sup> even die for her, as she admits at a picnic with Ruth.<sup>276</sup> At that very picnic Idgie gets some fresh honey for Ruth, which scares her to death (she is afraid that the bees will hurt Idgie). That is the very moment when Ruth notices that she has fallen in love with Idgie as well.<sup>277</sup> Even if she would like to stay with the Threadgoodes and especially with Idgie, Ruth feels the responsibility to return home and fulfil her task as a wife and mother, to fulfil what society at that time expects from her. When Idgie finds out that Ruth is determined to return home and to marry Frank Bennett, she gets very angry and upset.<sup>278</sup> After losing Buddy, she has now also lost Ruth.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Fannie Flagg, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), 33.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 74-75.

<sup>276</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 79.

<sup>277</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 81.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 82-84.

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 86.

As expected from her, Ruth marries.<sup>280</sup> Idgie drives to her house several times and goes in to talk to her once. She tells her that she loves her and never hated her.<sup>281</sup> Then she goes back to her life and continues as before, while Ruth experiences a brutal marriage. Her husband abuses her<sup>282</sup> so badly that she has to promise her mother on her deathbed to leave him. After the death of her mother she sends a letter to Idgie which is received by Idgie's mother. Momma Threadgoode sends Big George out to find Idgie immediately. When Idgie opens the letter, "[i]t was just a page torn out of the Bible, King James Version. Ruth 1:16-20: And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."<sup>283</sup> She does not really understand the message and asks her mother for advice, who tells her to go and free Ruth immediately. While telling this to Evelyn, Ninny admits that it was not common to leave your husband as Ruth did in that time and that it must have needed "courage to walk away like that".<sup>284</sup> This is the climax of the story. Ruth as a Christian borrows Ruth's words, her vow, to express her loyalty and love towards Idgie. She uses Ruth words to express her call for help and then Ruth saves Ruth. Ruth is finally freed from her violent husband and returns to the Threadgoodes. After a while she finds out that she is pregnant.<sup>285</sup>

Remarkable is the way Idgie's parents handle the whole situation. They support Idgie and Ruth all the time and do not seem to see any problem in their relationship. When Buddy Junior is born, Momma Threadgoode tells Idgie that he looks like her and Poppa (Idgie's father) tells her that "now she was going to be responsible for Ruth and a baby [...]".<sup>286</sup> In front of Ruth, Momma states that "we couldn't be happier for our little girl to have such a sweet companion as you."<sup>287</sup> The two women open a cafe and share the education of Buddy Junior<sup>288</sup>, Ruth as 'Momma' and Idgie as 'Aunt Idgie'.<sup>289</sup> Their cafe becomes an open place for people of all skin colours and also for homeless people who come there in order to work and, in exchange, to eat a decent meal. Of course at that time (1930's) not everybody appreciates their open attitude and they get into trouble with the Ku Klux Klan. After a warning by a friend who

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<sup>280</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 153-154.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 170.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 180.

<sup>283</sup> Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 183.

<sup>284</sup> Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 183.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 184.

<sup>286</sup> Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 185.

<sup>287</sup> Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 191.

<sup>288</sup> Koosed mentions that the way family is understood and perceived in the book is very similar to the Book of Ruth, as "[f]amilies are created through love and commitment, not necessarily marriage and birth" (Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 56.).

<sup>289</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 1.107.

wants them to be careful they make the meals for coloured people even cheaper.<sup>290</sup> Idgie and Ruth create an environment for Buddy to grow up in, for Ruth to live in peace away from her husband, for Idgie to have company in life and for many others who seem to be abandoned by society they create an open space where they are accepted and valued.<sup>291</sup>

There is another allusion to the Book of Ruth when Idgie and Ruth have a fight. Idgie is very upset about it and talks to her friend Eva. Eva reminds Idgie of the fact that “[t]hat girl gave up everything she had to come over here. She left her hometown and all her friends she grew up with – gave up all that just to be here and make a life for you.”<sup>292</sup> This strongly recalls Ruth’s (biblical) story. She also had to give up her life in order to cling to Naomi and start a new life with her in a new place far away from home and her family.<sup>293</sup>

After Ruth’s death Idgie is suspected of the murder of Frank Bennett and has to defend herself and Big George at the trial. There she is accused of having taken away Ruth from her husband. The accuser says, “That you have caused a good Christian woman to break God’s laws and her marriage vows?!”<sup>294</sup> The attentive reader knows better. Ruth herself had asked Idgie to do so when vowing to her lifelong commitment and company.

So, that is how Ruth saves Ruth and years later also Evelyn. Evelyn had lost her spirit as Idgie did after losing Buddy and Ruth, but got it back from hearing Ruth’s and Idgie’s story, from listening to Ninny’s story. The novel is fictional of course, but the topics are not and therefore the characters also do not seem unreliable to us. On the contrary, every story of the novel is likely to be identified with and Fannie Flagg finds a sensitive way to address her audience and to convey emotions. Idgie and Ruth are not like everyone else, but they feel, suffer, love and live just as everyone else does. And in their emotions we can feel them. Kathy Bates (actor in the role of Evelyn Couch) sums it up very appropriately by saying, “They are all individuals and whereas it’s a story about a lot of women, they are all real different. They all have real takes on life and there is no one real stereotype there.”<sup>295</sup>

The novel “spent 36 weeks on the bestseller list and the film was nominated for two Oscars.”<sup>296</sup> The screenplay for the movie (1991) was written by Fannie Flagg and Carol Sobieski and it was directed by Jon Avnet. The main characters were acted by very famous actors (Evelyn Couch – Kathy Bates / Idgie Threadgoode – Mary Stuart Masterson / Ruth

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<sup>290</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 48-51.

<sup>291</sup> See also Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 56.

<sup>292</sup> Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 248.

<sup>293</sup> See also Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 57.

<sup>294</sup> Flagg, *Tomatoes*, 326.

<sup>295</sup> Kathy Bates, *Fried Green Tomatoes*. DVD, Interviews, directed by Jon Avnet (USA, 1991), 0:07-0:19.

<sup>296</sup> “Fannie Flagg and 25 Years of ‘Fried Green Tomatoes’”, Garden&Gun.com, accessed June 14, 2018, <https://gardenandgun.com/articles/fannie-flagg-and-25-years-fried-green-tomatoes/>.

Jamison – Mary-Louise Parker / Ninny Threadgoode – Jessica Tandy) and the movie was watched by more than 80 million moviegoers.<sup>297</sup> Like every movie that is based on a book, it differs from its original. Fannie Flagg first refused to write the screenplay, because she felt too attached to the characters and would have a hard time selecting what is important and what not. That was why Carol Sobieski started with the screenplay and Fannie Flagg took over.<sup>298</sup> It is not important now to list all the differences between novel and movie, but rather to take a look at the portrayal of the relationship between Ruth and Idgie. The movie is less concrete than the novel, it leaves more freedom for interpretation. The love between the two women is not expressed in words, but rather more implicitly in actions. Some of the scenes can be regarded as alluding to a lesbian relationship.<sup>299</sup> Here it is up to the spectator to judge and interpret. I like this way of dealing with the issue. The book, too, uses words like love and expresses strong bonds and commitment, but it does not label or name it. Like Cheryl Exum, the reader or spectator can see Idgie's and Ruth's relationship in terms of "the strong bond between two women that range from deep and abiding friendship to lesbianism."<sup>300</sup>

Mary Stuart Masterson evaluates the richness of the movie very well by saying, "I think that the audiences would probably have a high variety of reactions of so much in this movie from love to loss, [...] youth to age, denial to depression, self-destruction to self-discovery, [...] to the homeless, racial issues [...] I mean everything, everything."<sup>301</sup>

#### 4.4 "Ruth in een ander licht"<sup>302</sup> – when Ruth inspires today

The Book of Ruth has inspired and inspires females immensely. The preceding three examples from the reception history show this. To be honest, it is not very surprising that the book has had such an impact. It is an extraordinary female narrative that invites females to think its message through and to apply it to their own life. Nevertheless, in my opinion it would be very limited to discuss only the feminist impact of the book. The Book of Ruth not only speaks to females, just as it not only describes the special relationship between two women. It also concerns family bonds, ethnic issues, religious dimensions (also law), existential dangers (death, hunger and insecurity) and more. All these aspects produce their own reception (history)

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<sup>297</sup> Cf. Fannie. Flagg, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, DVD, directed by Jon Avnet (USA, 1991), Cover.

<sup>298</sup> Cf. Garden&Gun, "Fannie Flagg".

<sup>299</sup> Cf. Rebecca Nicholson, "The film that makes me cry: Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café", *The Guardian*, March 16, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2015/mar/16/the-film-that-makes-me-cry-fried-green-tomatoes-whistle-stop-cafe-kathy-bates-jessica-tandy>.

<sup>300</sup> Exum, "Naomi", 134. See also Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 57.

<sup>301</sup> Mary Stuart Masterson, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, DVD, Interviews, directed by Jon Avnet (USA, 1991), 1:32-2:05.

<sup>302</sup> Ruthineenanderlicht.nl, "Het idee".

and cause different reactions from recipients of the story. Unfortunately, I am not able to discuss the reception history of all of them, but I have decided to pick one aspect that is highly topical and in my opinion also very important. I, as a European, living (mostly) in the twenty-first century, am very lucky to be able to live and study in a mostly peaceful environment. All I know about war, its violent and cruel character I either know from literature and movies or from the descriptions by witnesses of the First and/or Second World War. I was never afraid of losing my existence, my home, my family and friends; at least not as a result of war. But this does not hold true for the rest of the world. In many parts of this world, war, violence and injustice are people's daily companions, the dark shadow over their lives. The war in Syria for example claims countless victims and many of those who survive the terrible circumstances leave the country in order to find a resting place, a piece of peace elsewhere. They take the risk of crossing the Mediterranean Sea in order to get to Europe because they still have hope; hope in the continent of Europe, in the politicians, the social system and also in our humanity. But their journey is not over once they reach the European coast. Where to go? Where to stay? How long? Can we stay?

Sometimes I feel that the politicians, the governments and also we, the Europeans in general, tend to forget that they had no choice. They did not leave their land, people and all that belongs to it out of preference. But rather they hoped to find what was long gone in their countries of origin – shelter, peace and the perspective of a better future. And they all have their own story. They are individuals, concrete faces.

The two photographers Mujtaba Jalali, who is originally from Iran, but left the country after being arrested and censored in his work, and Sander Toelstra, who is Dutch, together started a project called “Ruth in een ander licht” or in English “Ruth seen in a different light”. Both artists get their inspiration from Stef Bos's song “Lied van Ruth”. The song alludes to the story of Ruth, especially to Ruth 1:16, and is written in Afrikaans. The result of the project was presented in an exposition in Amersfoort in 2016.<sup>303</sup> The exposition's aim is described as following: “Through penetrating portraits that tell the story of six women they make the European migration issue visible.”<sup>304</sup> With this project the two artists not only show us faces, individuals, but also give them a voice and a space to tell their personal story using the frame of the story of Ruth. On the homepage of the project one of the sections is dedicated to the biblical narrative. Under the title “Het verhaal” they tell a brief version of Ruth's and Naomi's unusual story. First, the Book of Ruth is given its location within the Bible. Second, the situation

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<sup>303</sup> Cf. [Ruthineenanderlicht.nl](http://Ruthineenanderlicht.nl), “Het idee”.

<sup>304</sup> [Ruthineenanderlicht.nl](http://Ruthineenanderlicht.nl), “Het idee”.



of Naomi is explained, the loss of her husband and children and her plan to return to Israel. Ruth is said to be her daughter-in-law who is travelling with her. Third, the vow of Ruth is cited (v.16). Fourth, they arrive at their destination, where Naomi states that she had left the country rich (also in relationships) and returns now with nothing. Fifth, it is explained how Ruth tries to resolve the situation and meets Boas. Sixth, they marry and have a son. At the end of the section they refer the interested reader to the story in the biblical original. The story is paraphrased in a way that highlights Ruth's identity as a foreigner who leaves her country of origin and is willing to settle down elsewhere. And her story has a happy end. She marries Boas and gives birth to a son. Even though her vow is mentioned, it does not function in the same way as it does in the narrative as a whole. The story of Ruth and Orpah and their difficult decision is not mentioned at all. Furthermore, nothing is said about Ruth clinging to Naomi and their special relationship. The story is not changed, just emphasised differently and this happens for a reason. Ruth has the chance to return home as Orpah did, to a safe haven, but the six women (exposition portraits) left their countries of origin behind because they were not secure anymore. Ruth and the women choose to leave their country of origin behind and to become foreigners, but the conditions and options differ. This particular reception of the Book of Ruth asks for a different perspective and emphasises a different aspect of Ruth's identity. It is not about Ruth, the bold one, and her relationship with Naomi, but about Ruth, the foreigner, the stranger.

I recommend everyone to take a look at the homepage of the project and also to listen to Stef Bos's beautiful and touching song. Also accessible on the homepage is a video, where the singer/songwriter explains why he wrote the song. In the video he names a friend as his source of inspiration. When he asked this friend about a specific text in the Bible that she likes, she named the Book of Ruth and specifically v.16b. Then he started to brainstorm about the verse and the result was the song.<sup>305</sup> The song is loaded with personal feelings and references, admits Stef Bos in the video. He is originally from the Netherlands, but lived also in Belgium in the past and is currently spending his life partly in South Africa<sup>306</sup>, his wife's country of origin. He knows how it feels to be a stranger somewhere away from home and he is conscious that it always means steering a middle course between not losing one's own identity and assimilating to the new and unfamiliar one.<sup>307</sup> But the song is more than that. Besides being a homage to his friend and a melody to his life, it is also a love song, an Afrikaans love song to

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<sup>305</sup> "Herkomst Lied van Ruth", Ruthineenanderlicht.nl, video, 0:36-1:14, accessed May 28, 2018, <http://www.ruthineenanderlicht.nl/2016/09/16/herkomst-lied-ruth/>.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. Ruthineenanderlicht.nl, "Het idee".

<sup>307</sup> Ruthineenanderlicht.nl, "Herkomst Lied van Ruth", 1:15-1:52.

his South African wife. He admits that only in retrospect did he realise that he had written a love song. He decided to go with his wife to South Africa just as Ruth had decided to go with Naomi to Israel, out of love.<sup>308</sup>

Jou land is my land.  
Jou volk is my volk.  
Jou taal is my taal.  
En jouw God is my God.  
En jou droom is my droom.  
Jou pad is my pad.  
Jou toekoms my toekoms.  
en jou hart is my hart.<sup>309</sup>

Here we see how an autobiographic love song inspired two artists and guided them in expressing current suffering. The Book of Ruth is so much more than just a story, it is a metaphor for love, friendship and loyalty, but also for leaving home, being a stranger and for settling down elsewhere. In Bos's song everything comes together. Ruth lives in our reception, in good times and in bad times, in joy and in suffering.

## 5. Bringing ideas together? – current liturgical ideas for same-sex marriages in Germany

In my last chapter I would like to venture a little excursion into practical theology. Of course this will happen on the basis of my exegetical work, as I am questioning the exegetical foundation of specific decisions in current liturgical drafts in Germany. To be concrete, the idea of my thesis developed after working with one particular draft at the beginning of my studies. Back then I was surprised that Ruth 1:16-17 was named there as a biblical text proposal. I asked myself, does the Book of Ruth deal with marriage, with relationship? And also does it concern same-sex relations? I must admit that I was not that familiar with the Book of Ruth at the time and especially not with the different interpretations of the relationship between Naomi and Ruth, but I did not forget my concern and my question when I searched for a topic for my master thesis. I developed a research question and started my work on Ruth's vow. Now, almost at the end of my work, I can say: there is clear allusion to marriage in the Book of Ruth and there is evidence for a strong female friendship that breaks with conventions of its time. Ruth and

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<sup>308</sup> Ruthineenanderlicht.nl, "Herkomst Lied van Ruth", 2:26-2:55.

<sup>309</sup> "Liedteksten. Lied van Ruth", stefbos.nl, accessed May 28, 2018, [http://www.stefbos.nl/page/Liedteksten/detail/1827/Lied\\_van\\_Ruth](http://www.stefbos.nl/page/Liedteksten/detail/1827/Lied_van_Ruth).

Naomi are special and so is their relationship. Being so, they have inspired many readers and especially feminists. I do not agree that Naomi and Ruth were a lesbian couple, but I think following Koosed that it is crucial for the interpretation of the book to leave the ambiguity unresolved. Koosed concludes the analysis of their relationship by asking, “Is it love, friendship, romance, resentment, frustration, loyalty, longing, necessity? Yes. Such uncertainty does not obscure the meaning; such uncertainty is the meaning.”<sup>310</sup> During my research I started to analyse different liturgical drafts from various churches in Germany and watched out for the use of Ruth 1:16-17. Next, it was my aim to find out why this passage was used in general in the context of same-sex marriages (exegetical reasoning) and furthermore in which parts of the proposals (sermon, beginning, blessing...) and why. Therefore, I started to write emails to the persons responsible all over Germany and asked for answers. After many emails, phone calls and discussions I am happy to present the findings of my research in the following. I convey my thanks to all the friendly persons who were willing to be questioned by me and to help me with my research. Without this help I would not have been able to write this chapter.

First, I would like to give a short introduction to the German context and debate on the topic.

## 5.1 The German church jungle and the question of homosexual marriages

Germany consists of 20 *Landeskirchen* (regional churches) which are Lutheran, Reformed or United and are represented together in the institution of the EKD (Evangelische Kirche Deutschland/Protestant Church of Germany).<sup>311</sup> All these churches have their own and specific standpoint when it comes to the evaluation of homosexual marriages. What is allowed, what not? How is homosexual marriage related to heterosexual marriage? Most of the churches at least agree on one point: no minister can be obligated to bless a gay couple. Instead of explaining all the differences between the churches, it is more efficient in this context to present the different tendencies that exist. Therefore, I will follow a categorisation I found in an online article. There the different churches are classified into four groups:<sup>312</sup>

1. “Fast wie Trauung”<sup>313</sup> (almost like marriage)<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 63.

<sup>311</sup> Cf. “Die Struktur der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)”, [evangelisch.de](https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/113505/20-09-2012/die-struktur-der-evangelischen-kirche-deutschland-ekd), accessed June 22, 2018, <https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/113505/20-09-2012/die-struktur-der-evangelischen-kirche-deutschland-ekd>.

<sup>312</sup> For the following cf. “Segnung Homosexueller: Bunt wie ein Regenbogen. Wie gehen die Landeskirchen mit der Segnung gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare um?”, [evangelisch.de](https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/111225/20-11-2014/segnung-homosexueller-bunt-wie-ein-regenbogen), accessed June 22, 2018, <https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/111225/20-11-2014/segnung-homosexueller-bunt-wie-ein-regenbogen>.

<sup>313</sup> [Evangelisch.de](https://www.evangelisch.de), “Segnung Homosexueller”.

<sup>314</sup> Many German churches distinguish between Segnung and Trauung. Trauung is the ‘traditional’ marriage/wedding between woman and man and Segnung means blessing and tries to avoid attaching the term ‘wedding’ to a homosexual wedding. The reason is to avoid linguistic equality between the two liturgical practices.

The churches that belong to this category make no difference between homo- and heterosexual marriages. Both are celebrated publicly, officially and are similar in content. Furthermore, both are entered into the church register.

2. “Öffentlicher Gottesdienst”<sup>315</sup> (public service)

Regional churches that belong to this category allow the public celebration of homosexual marriage as they allow it for heterosexual marriage. It is often practiced in the same way, but should not be called *Trauung* and is not registered officially.

3. “Betonung des Unterschieds”<sup>316</sup> (emphasis of the difference)

As the title already betrays, the churches in this category often do not allow a public blessing/ceremony for homosexual couples or only in a very restricted way. In doing so they always emphasise the difference between the two *casualia*. If the public blessing/ceremony is forbidden, it is only possible to bless the couple (some churches even say that only the individuals can be blessed and not the relationship per se) in the private context of pastoral care.

4. “Die Gemeinde entscheidet”<sup>317</sup> (the community decides)

The churches belonging to this category leave it open to the ministers and communities to decide how to handle the issue.

In addition I will shortly present two quite divergent churches. In June 2017 the German *Bundestag* cleared the way for the *Ehe für alle* / matrimony for all. The church of Hessen and Nassau reacted to this decision by reforming their church law concerning homosexual marriages. Hessen and Nassau belongs to category 1, as they established a “rechtlich und theologisch”<sup>318</sup> equality between the two forms in 2013. In 2019 the last difference between the almost equal ceremonies will be removed. The new law will introduce the term *Trauung* for all ceremonies. The church therefore clearly “zählt zu den Pionieren der Gleichstellung”.<sup>319</sup>

The church of Bavaria on the contrary can be regarded as a newcomer in terms of the issue, as they decided in April 2018 to join category 2 instead of 3. Moreover, they are currently writing their own liturgical draft.<sup>320</sup>

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I am not going to follow this linguistic subtlety. For me both are marriages, weddings and what else we might call them.

<sup>315</sup> Evangelisch.de, “Segnung Homosexueller”.

<sup>316</sup> Evangelisch.de, “Segnung Homosexueller”.

<sup>317</sup> Evangelisch.de, “Segnung Homosexueller”.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. “Synode bringt Trauung für alle auf den Weg”, evangelisch.de, accessed June 22, 2018, <https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/149816/28-04-2018/synode-bringt-trauung-fuer-alle-auf-den-weg>.

<sup>319</sup> Evangelisch.de, “Trauung für alle”.

<sup>320</sup> Cf. “Zukünftig öffentliche Segnungen gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare in der ELKB”, landessynode.bayern-evangelisch.de, accessed June 22, 2018, <https://landessynode.bayern-evangelisch.de/Segnung-gleichgeschlechtlicher-Paare-852.php>. / Evangelisch.de, “Segnung Homosexueller” / “Können

These two examples show how divided Germany's churches are and that while some churches are still debating the 'if', others are much further and are concretising the 'how'. It is therefore not possible to give an evaluation of 'the' Protestant church in Germany, but only to offer a glimpse into several churches.

## 5.2 Ruth 1:16/17 and the liturgical drafts

In order to make it easier to analyse my findings, the results will be presented in the form of a chart. The communication with the different churches was fully in German and many terms are difficult to translate, therefore the chart will be in German. The evaluation of the findings will be written in English and I will try to explain as much as possible.

Landeskirche	Westfalen	Kurhessen-Waldeck	Baden	Bayern	Hessen und Nassau
Kategorie <sup>321</sup>	2	2	1	2	1
Ansprechpartner/in	Dr. Vicco von Bülow, Dezernent für Gottesdienst <sup>322</sup>	Helmut Wöllenstein, Leiter der liturgischen Kammer <sup>323</sup>	Dagmar Zobel, Prälatin <sup>324</sup>	Anne-Lore Mauer, Bildung Evangelisch <sup>325</sup> Jörg Hammerbacher, Kirchenrat (Referat Gemeindeentwicklung) <sup>326</sup>	Sabine Bäuerle, Oberkirchenrätin und Leiterin des Zentrum Verkündigung <sup>327</sup>
Art des Entwurfs	„Segnungsgottesdienst für Paare in eingetragener Lebenspartnerschaft“ <sup>328</sup>	„Segnung von Paaren in eingetragener Lebenspartnerschaft. Materialien für den Gottesdienst“ <sup>329</sup>	Verzicht auf Entwurf, aber ausführliche Debatte zur Einführung der gleichg. Trauung 2016	„Trauung, Segnung, Hochzeitsfeier? Dokumentation zum Studientag zur liturgischen Begleitung von Lebenspartnerschaften in der ELKB“ <sup>330</sup>	„Liturgisches Material. Für einen Gottesdienst anlässlich der Segnung eines gleichgeschlechtlichen Paares“ <sup>331</sup>

gleichgeschlechtliche Paare heiraten?“ traueung, bayern-evangelisch.de, accessed June 22, 2018, <https://traueung.bayern-evangelisch.de/segen-gleichgeschlechtlicher-paare.php>.

<sup>321</sup> As indicated in #5.1.

<sup>322</sup> Cf. Vicco von Bülow, email contact, May 9, 2018/May 30, 2018.

<sup>323</sup> Cf. Helmut Wöllenstein, email contact, May 2, 2018/May 3, 2018.

<sup>324</sup> Cf. Dagmar Zobel, email contact, May 28, 2018.

<sup>325</sup> Cf. Anne-Lore Mauer, email contact, June 6, 2018.

<sup>326</sup> Cf. Jörg Hammerbacher, email contact, June 1, 2018.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. Sabine Bäuerle, phone call, June 7, 2018.

<sup>328</sup> Cf. Landeskirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche von Westfalen, ed., *Segnungsgottesdienst für Paare in eingetragener Lebenspartnerschaft* (Bielefeld: Luther Verlag, 2015).

<sup>329</sup> Cf. Landeskirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck, ed., *Segnung von Paaren in eingetragener Lebenspartnerschaft. Materialien für den Gottesdienst* (Verlag Evangelischer Medienverband Kassel, 2013).

<sup>330</sup> Cf. Peter Bubmann, Silvia Jühne, and Anne-Lore Mauer, ed., *Trauung, Segnung, Hochzeitsfeier? Dokumentation zum Studientag zur liturgischen Begleitung von Lebenspartnerschaften in der ELKB* (Erlangen: Selbstverlag Professur für Praktische Theologie der FAU + bildung evangelisch (Erlangen), 2017).

<sup>331</sup> Cf. Sabine Bäuerle, *Liturgisches Material. Für einen Gottesdienst anlässlich der Segnung eines gleichgeschlechtlichen Paares* (Zentrum für Verkündigung: <https://www.zentrum->

				Entscheidung zu Kategorie 2 (April 2018), Planung einer Arbeitshilfe	Erweiterung/ Ergänzung/ Erneuerung Material von 2004 <sup>332</sup>
Verwendung Ruth 1:(14-)16/17	-Segnung, Hinführung zur Schriftlesung, Schriftlesung Ruth 1:16-17 <sup>333</sup>	-Segnung, Hinführung zur Schriftlesung, Schriftlesung Ruth 1:16-17 <sup>334</sup>	-keine Verwendung in Debatte	Illustration zu Ruth 1:16-17, Titelbild <sup>335</sup> eventuelle Verwendung in Arbeitshilfe	-Ansprache, Beispiele für Trauverse als Basis für Traupredigt <sup>336</sup>
Begründung	-Wunsch & Beliebtheit, „praxisbezogene Aktualisierung“ <sup>337</sup> -Hinführung = Einordnung Kontext -Ausdruck evangelisches Segensverständnis -andere Aspekte dürfen auch anklingen	-Themen: Familie, über ethnische und religiöse Grenzen hinaus, „Zusammenleben von Menschen“ <sup>338</sup> -Beziehung von Ruth & Naomi (außergewöhnlich) -Ruths Gelübde = Schöne Zusage -Kontext muss beachtet werden -Verwendung in Traugende	-bei Textverwendung (in Zeremonie) parallel zu heterosexueller Trauung behandelt	-keine explizit durchgeführte Exegese zum Anlass der Titelbildgestaltung -Hommage an Text als „Augenzwinkern“ <sup>339</sup> -Funktion des „Brückenschlags“ <sup>340</sup> (zwischen hetero und homo Segnung/ Paare) Bibeltexte sollen Unterschied Trauung/ Segnung hervorheben	-Beliebtheit, auch bei heterosexuellen Paaren -Kontext wichtig -außergewöhnlicher Charakter darf anklingen
Prägnantes Zitat	Oft Sprüche aus dem Kontext gerissen „Deshalb ist es immer auch Aufgabe der Traupredigt, den garstigen	„Natürlich war uns klar, dass mit dieser ungewöhnlichen Beziehung zwischen zwei Frauen das Spektrum der in		„als Brückenschlag fungieren: Heterosexuelle Paare haben diese Vertrauenszusage im Buch	

verkuendigung.de/fileadmin/content/Veroeffentlichungen/Reihe\_Texte/TEXTE\_4\_Segnung\_gleichgeschlechtliche\_Partnerschaften\_-\_Endfassung.pdf).

<sup>332</sup> Interessant ist, dass es in der EKHN keine Agenden gibt, sondern nur liturgische Entwürfe, die natürlich genuin zum landeskirchlichen Konsens angefertigt werden. Das bedeutet das diese nicht von der Landeskirche verabschiedet werden müssen. Diese Tatsache ermöglicht dem Zentrum Verkündigung mehr Freiräume, die sehr geschätzt werden.

<sup>333</sup> Cf. Westfalen, *Lebenspartnerschaft*, 25.

<sup>334</sup> Cf. Kurhessen-Waldeck, *Lebenspartnerschaft*, 16.

<sup>335</sup> Cf. Bubmann/Jühne/Mauer, *Trauung*, cover, © Martina Schradi.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Bäuerle, *Liturgisches Material*, 16. Es gibt eine Internetseite trauspruch.de, bei der Paare sich durch verschiedene Optionen zum passenden Trauspruch klicken und Inspiration finden können. Ich habe mich dort einmal umgesehen und in wenigen Minuten bin ich durch die richtige Klickkombination auf Ruth 1:16-17 gestoßen. Man findet diesen Spruch mit der Kombination: zunächst „Treue“, dann „Wir wollen uns Treue bleiben“ und zuletzt „Der Trauspruch soll... Er soll uns ein Wegweiser sein“. Dann gibt es eine kurze Erläuterung zum Kontext des Spruch und auch Empfehlungen, wann sich dieser eignet, bzw. gerade nicht eignet - ein interessantes Projekt. (Cf. Trauspruch.de.)

<sup>337</sup> Vicco von Bülow, email contact, May 9, 2018.

<sup>338</sup> Helmut Wöllenstein, email contact, May 2, 2018.

<sup>339</sup> Anne-Lore Mauer, email contact, June 6, 2018.

<sup>340</sup> Anne-Lore Mauer, email contact, June 6, 2018.

	hermeneu- tischen Graben zwischen Bibelspruch und Trauung oder Segnung zu thematizieren und zu überbrücken.“ <sup>341</sup>	der Bibel beschriebenen möglichen Formen familiären Zusammenlebens explizit und auf sehr originelle Weise erweitert wird, - ohne dass wir ein feministisches Anliegen hätten heraus- oder hinein lesen müssen.“ <sup>342</sup>		Ruth für ihre eigenen Beziehungen zu nutzen gelernt. Sie auch im homophilen Kontext zu nutzen, ermöglicht den Verweis auf einen ähnlichen Erfahrungshori- zont.“ <sup>343</sup> -----	
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What does this research show? When I started my work and got to know the feminist interpretation, especially the argumentation concerning Ruth 1:14, I hoped, when asking the people who wrote and developed the different liturgical proposals/drafts about the reason for the usage of Ruth 1:16-17, to get a clear answer based on exegetical findings and analysis that would support my thesis. This did not happen. Each person I interviewed has profound theological and exegetical knowledge. Exegetical knowledge is part of their education and accordingly part of their presuppositions. That is the reason why every decision is always to a certain degree influenced by these parameters, but in my research I asked for concrete and explicit exegetical analysis which did not happen consciously. Ruth 1:16-17 is not, at least not in the first place, part of the proposals because the relationship of Ruth and Naomi is special, ambivalent and offers a fruitful basis for homosexual couples to identify with. Instead, I found out that the use of the verses mostly has to do with their popularity among couples (often with heterosexual background experience) who articulate the desire to express their loyalty with Ruth's words. Adding the verses to the liturgical drafts for same-sex marriages is then an act of assimilation to its traditional 'model', heterosexual marriage. While the representatives of the churches always emphasise the original context of the book that has to be considered, they also acknowledged that the text never says only what is primarily intended, but also exists independently of its purpose. In this open space it is perfectly allowable to allude to diverse aspects of the story of Ruth and Naomi and their special relationship. Even if I did not get the answer I was hoping for, I think that, for the sake of equality and acceptance of same-sex marriages in the church, I got an answer that is worth more: Ruth 1:16-17 is mentioned in the liturgical drafts for same-sex marriages because it belongs to the established texts in

<sup>341</sup> Vicco von Bülow, email contact, May 30, 2018.

<sup>342</sup> Helmut Wöllenstein, email contact, May 3, 2018.

<sup>343</sup> Anne-Lore Mauer, email contact, June 6, 2018.

heterosexual marriages. The usage does not intend to underline a difference between the two forms, but equality. This gives hope for a future in which we are able to accept each other without regard to our sexual orientation and do not judge the desire for a blessed marriage, regardless of who asks and wishes for it.

## 6. Concluding thoughts

To conclude, I would like to sum up the content of the preceding five chapters in the following nine theses:

1. The textual criticism of the passage showed that the version of the MT is reliable. The discussion of the different issues underlined the importance of v.14 and the religious assimilation of Ruth.
2. The analysis of the text highlights the unusual decision of Ruth, the peculiarity of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi and the religious aspect of the text.
3. It was necessary to pay special attention to v.14 and the term *קִבְּלָהּ*. The term alludes to Gen 2:24 and is crucial for Ruth's strong decision.
4. There are many different interpretations of the intertextuality between Ruth 1:14 and Gen 2:24. The issue is uncertain and therefore leaves space for ambiguity and interpretation, which enriches the text.<sup>344</sup> I would have liked to answer the question from the beginning (title) by saying that it is unnecessary to label the relationship and that we can live with the ambiguity, focusing only on the values and parameters of the relationship, but I think that would be idealistic. Every reader/exegete must decide how to evaluate the intertextuality and with it the relationship between the two women, but as we would say in German, 'der Ton macht die Musik' (it's not what you say but the way you say it). It is about the way we establish our reality. Labelling something does not mean that we have to judge others and their interpretation, nor should we discriminate or exclude people with our terminology (see 7.).
5. I decided to follow Berquist's 'Role Dedifferentiation'. In doing so I label the relationship neither friendship nor lesbianism. We do not have many different 'boxes' to put relationships in, which I consider part of the problem.<sup>345</sup> If it is either black or white, I choose grey. The relationship incorporates many different parameters and is complicated to grasp. My adaption of Berquist's interpretation

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<sup>344</sup> Cf. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 63.

<sup>345</sup> Cf. Brehony, "Coming to Consciousness", 21-22.



responds to this issue and does not forget to emphasise the strong bond between the two women.

6. The ambiguity of the relationship offers the possibility of making homosexual orientation a subject of discussion based on the Bible and can serve as a reference for identification in a narrative (Bible) that due to its 'Sitz im Leben' elsewhere excludes many people (foreigners, women...) and forms of living (following Fischer).<sup>346</sup>
7. Ruth's vow incorporates traces of the covenantal and marriage formula. It is therefore not adequate to talk about eisegesis and violation of the text when referring to the usage of the text in marriage ceremonies. In any case the usage of the verses must be examined and a couple should be aware of its particular meaning. The two do not marry, the vow is one-sided and Naomi's silence is not a clear reaction to Ruth's words.
8. The reception history shows the importance and topicality of the subject. The ambiguity of the relationship is depicted in several paintings; the history of the 'Boston Marriages' shows that it is not always good to label and thereby judge different types of relationship, but that we should rather focus on the values these relationships represent; the concept of 'Affidamento' shows how Ruth inspires other women; Ruth ('Fried Green Tomatoes') is equipped to speak and to ask for help by using her ancient role model's words, and the photographers of 'Ruth in een ander licht' borrow Ruth's story to show pain and struggle today.
9. The German context shows again that labelling (cf. 'Boston Marriages') keeps people from recognising the value of a relationship. They focus on linguistical differentiation rather than inner values. As long as German churches do not stop categorising and judging forms of love, devotion and relationship by using different words to label the liturgical act belonging to it (Trauung vs. Segnung), acceptance and equality will not be reached.

In a nutshell, Ruth 1:16-17 alludes to marriages and the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is special. Of course every reader has to find his/her own way of labelling the relationship, but its nature is rather 'untitled', leaving us with the freedom to interpret.<sup>347</sup> Important is that we recognise the incomparable character of the relationship and do not try to degrade the other's interpretation, as the Book of Ruth does not belong to anyone, nor does anyone own its

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<sup>346</sup> Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, 263.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 63.

interpretational sovereignty. Perhaps we must learn how to see what a relationship is built on and which values it conveys<sup>348</sup>, rather than persist in putting them into linguistic boxes which might establish a linguistic reality, but not necessarily do them justice. But this might again be quite idealistic.

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<sup>348</sup> This happened when the church of Hessen and Nassau decided to label both marriages 'Trauung' since both ceremonies are equal and German law no longer distinguishes between the two either. There is no need for differentiation, which in fact was already the conclusion of my seminar at the beginning of my studies four years ago.

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1. Explanation of Core Testimony and Countertestimony (Brueggemann)

Brueggemann presents the terms Core Testimony and Countertestimony in his *Theology of the Old Testament* and makes it clear that both phenomena can be found in the OT itself and belong there.<sup>349</sup> The Core Testimony is based on God, the one God Israel believes in, who is active and acts in an obvious, noticeable and present way.<sup>350</sup> This God is ‘powerful and faithful’.<sup>351</sup> He is able to maintain a good life for the Israelites.<sup>352</sup> This Core Testimony is expressed “by appeal to the great transformative verbs of Yahweh [...] derivative adjectives and noun-metaphors of Israel’s speech [...]”.<sup>353</sup> The term Countertestimony does not question what the Core Testimony declares God to be for Israel.<sup>354</sup> On the contrary, it points to the fact that Israel does not ‘notice’ ‘the Core-Testimony God’ every day, but instead sometimes/often experiences a lack of justice in its world which leads to complaining and remembering the exile as a metaphor for collective and personal suffering.<sup>355</sup> Then God seems to be somehow ‘hidden’, ‘ambiguous’ and perceived ‘negatively’, because he is very well able to act in the way of the Core Testimony and Israel’s goal is to remind him/her to do so in praying, complaining and addressing him/her in other ways.<sup>356</sup> Countertestimony does not show that Israel questioned the power and almightiness of God and lost its faith, but names a problem that is certainly relevant in its daily life, the fact that God sometimes seems to be inactive and invisible. Countertestimony is a call for change, addressing God who is able to act.<sup>357</sup> Therefore, Countertestimony belongs to the OT and provokes new ways of describing God, for example within the wisdom literature.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 317.

<sup>350</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 317.320.

<sup>351</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 321.

<sup>352</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 324.

<sup>353</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology*, 324.

<sup>354</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 318.

<sup>355</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 322.

<sup>356</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 318.

<sup>357</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 321.

<sup>358</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 334.

## 8.2. A story in a story – summary of the book<sup>359</sup>

Fannie Flagg's novel tells two stories at the same time: the story of Ruth and Idgie (1920-60s), which is embedded in the story of Evelyn and Ninny (1980s).<sup>360</sup> Evelyn is a woman in her late forties that lives together with her husband Ed in Birmingham. She has two grown children and does not work. In order to save her marriage, she takes classes to freshen it up a little and tries to cheer her husband up, but it does not really work. Evelyn is very frustrated. She is unhappy with her life, her marriage, her body and she is afraid, afraid of hospitals, diseases and mostly of death. Her situation makes her consider suicide more and more. Every week she accompanies her husband to the nursing home where his mother lives, but because the old lady does not really appreciate her company, she mostly waits outside in the reception room of the nursing home. That is where she meets Ninny, an old lady of more than eighty years. Ninny immediately starts a conversation with Evelyn. She tells her the story of Idgie and Ruth, which to a certain degree is also her story. Every week she reveals a little bit more of the life at Whistle Stop, the little town where Ninny grew up and the story mostly takes place.<sup>361</sup>

Idgie Threadgoode belongs to the Threadgoode family, which has nine children of its own, but they also 'adopted' the little Ninny, who later marries Cleo, one of Idgie's brothers. The young Idgie has a very special relationship with her brother Buddy, who dies as a teenager in a dramatic accident. It breaks Idgie's heart and makes her take off from home. The only person that from then on knows where she is, is Big George, who works for her parents and stays a confidant throughout Idgie's life. One summer Ruth, the daughter of a befriended family, goes to the Threadgoodes in order to spend the summer and teach at Sunday school. She is also supposed to bring Idgie back to the family, school and 'normal life'. Idgie falls in love with Ruth, who also develops feelings for her. Once the summer comes to an end, Ruth leaves Whistle Stop in order to get married to the man she is supposed to marry back home. And Idgie's heart breaks for the second time.<sup>362</sup> Ruth moves in with her husband and takes care of her mother. Frank Bennett, Ruth's husband, abuses her constantly. When her mother dies she begs Ruth to leave him. After her death Ruth sends a letter to Idgie which marks the turning point of the story. Idgie comes to pick Ruth up. Later, while already living with the Threadgoodes, Ruth realises that she is pregnant. Idgie and Ruth open a cafe and raise Buddy

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<sup>359</sup> Cf. Flagg, *Tomatoes*.

<sup>360</sup> Cf. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 56.

<sup>361</sup> The story involves many characters which are essential for the story, but due to the limitation of this thesis they cannot be named and explained sufficiently. I refer the interested reader to the book and the movie in order to get to know this wonderful world personally.

<sup>362</sup> Here the movie is more dramatic because Ruth is involved when Buddy dies. Idgie then connects her with Buddy's death and their relationship is burdened.

Junior together. When Frank Bennett finds out about his offspring, he tries to kidnap the baby, but Sipsey (Big George's mother) tries to stop him and while doing so kills him. Because everybody knows that nobody would believe a coloured woman, they decide to make him and his car disappear in a bizarre way. The police comes to Whistle Stop and interviews everyone but is not able to solve the case. Years later, after Ruth has died of cancer, the police finds Frank Bennett's car and arrests Idgie and Big George. At the trial they are acquitted because the minister of Whistle Stop gives them an alibi.

Evelyn very much appreciates this story and gets new strength from it and strikes up a friendship with Ninny. Ninny encourages her to start working and to bring her life back on track. Filled with new spirit and the desire to live, Evelyn starts following a radical diet at a boot camp. That is when she gets a letter telling her that Ninny has died in her absence. The old lady has left her some personal things and clearly changed Evelyn's life. In Whistle Stop Evelyn searches for Ninny's, Idgie's and Ruth's traces and makes peace with herself.

### 8.3 Lied van Ruth<sup>363</sup> / Song of Ruth<sup>364</sup>, Lyrics

Ek is n vreemde hier	I am a stranger here
Ek het my land gelos	I left my own land
Ek het jou pad gekruis	I crossed paths with you
Ek het jou spoor gevolg	I followed your tracks
Jy het gese gaan terug	You said to go back
Moe nie op my vertrou	Not to trust you
Maar jy s n deel van my	But you are a part of me
Wat doen ek sonder jou	What do I do without you?
En ek weet die toekoms is onseker	And I know the future is uncertain
En die donker is digby	And the darkness is near
En ek weet ons wag n lang reis	And I know we await a long journey
Reg deur die woestyn	Through the desert
Maar jou land is my land	But your land is my land
Jou volk is my volk	Your people are my people
Jou taal is my taal	Your language is my language
Jouw God is my God	Your God is my God
Jou droom is my droom	Your dream is my dream
Jou pad is my pad	Your path is my path
Jou toekoms my toekoms	Your future is my future
Jou hart is my hart	Your heart is my heart
Ek weet jou volk is bang	I know your people are scared
Voor ons wat anders is	Of us who are different
Maar ek sal brugge bou	But I will build bridges

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<sup>363</sup> Stefbos.nl, "Liedteksten. Lied van Ruth".

<sup>364</sup> English translation mostly done by my fellow student Jackie N. Ncala, who was willing to help me out with her good knowledge of Afrikaans.

Daar waar die afgrond is

En ek sal terugverlang

Wanneer die wind sal waai

Wat uit die suide kom

Van my geboorte grond

Maar ek sal sterk wees

En ek sal oorleef

Want ek wil naas jou staan

Al sal dit moeilik wees

Maar jou land is my land

Jou volk is my volk

Jou taal is my taal

Jouw God is my God

Jou droom is my droom

Jou pad is my pad

Jou toekoms my toekoms

Jou hart is my hart

My deel is jou deel

My brood is jou brood

Jou lewe is my lewe

Jou dood is my dood

En wanneer die donker kom

En jou mense my ontwyk

Sal ek my liefde gee

Totdat die haat verdwyn

Want jou huis is my huis

There where the abyss is

And I will be filled with longing

When the wind will blow

Which comes from the south

Of my birthland

But I will be strong

And I will survive

Because I want to stand next to you

Even if it will be difficult

But your land is my land

Your people are my people

Your language is my language

Your God is my God

Your dream is my dream

Your path is my path

Your future is my future

Your heart is my heart

My share is your share

My bread is your bread

Your life is my life

Your death is my death

And when the darkness comes

And your people avoid me

I will give my love

Until the hatred disappears

Because your home is my home

Jou angs is my angs

Jou stilte my stilte

Jou land is my land

Your fear is my fear

Your silence is my silence

Your land is my land



8.4 Illustration Ruth 1:16-17, Cover<sup>365</sup>



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<sup>365</sup> Bubmann/Jühne./Mauer, *Trauung*, cover, © Martina Schrudi.