

Central Queensland University

Amy Bennett

Two neat boxes

Biographical note:

Amy Bennett, BA Arts Hons (UOW), Grad Cert SCD (UOW), is a PhD candidate at Central Queensland University creating an illustrated historical novel on the transgenerational impacts of the Vietnam War in Australia. Using hand-pulled screen printing and photography, Amy's creative work explores issues of war and post-war lives, trauma, survival and resilience.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Graphic memoir – Death – Suicide – Survival

Two Neat Boxes: A Graphic Memoir

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When I was 14, my oldest brother visited me in a dream.



He told me he had to go...

I am in pain...
I have to leave to
be free.



I did not want him to leave.



He left anyway.

The next day, my mother told me he was dead.



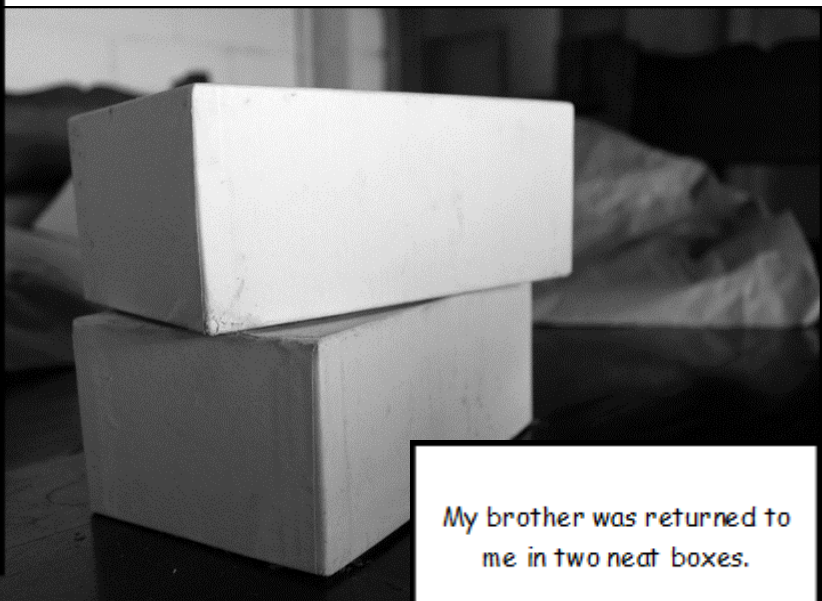
Cremated and buried with grandparents we had never met...

I thought of him in the ground, far from his family.. Alone.



My brother was 19 years old.

When my brother had been dead almost as long as he was alive, I was granted permission to release his cremated remains from the ground.



My brother was returned to me in two neat boxes.

Research statement

Research background

Comic scholar Jared Gardner states that ‘comic writing is the only medium capable of ... allowing the shades of the past to overlap with and speak the impulses of the present’ (2006: 799). Gardner further claims comics as a verbal/visual medium make ‘the present aware of [a] past that is always in the process of becoming’ (799). This ability has been used eighteen years after the suicide of my brother to capture a personal experience of survival in a verbal/visual medium.

Research contribution

Research into writers and artists taking a visual/verbal form to communicate themes of survival, such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivors Tale* (1986), Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* (2003) and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* (2006) were used as reference points in the creation of ‘Two neat boxes’. Where other work has focused on themes of war and difference to demonstrate personal narratives of survival, *Two Neat Boxes* endeavours to illustrate the nature of suicide and the lasting impacts suicide has to those left behind in a graphic form.

Research significance

Two Neat Boxes focuses on the significance of dream sequence and memory in the development of a female protagonist, and introduces the concept of sibling suicide as an ongoing narrative that is both ‘finished’, as illustrated in the act of suicide, and ‘unfinished’ as seen in the protagonist’s act of unearthing her brother’s remains eighteen years later. It has been peer reviewed and published in a leading creative writing journal.

Works cited

Bechdel, A 2006 *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Gardner, J 2006 ‘Archives, Collectors, and the New Media Work of Comics’, *Modern Fiction Studies* 52: 4, 787-806

Satrapi, M 2003 *Persepolis*, New York: Pantheon

Spiegelman, A 1986 *Maus: A Survivors Tale*, New York: Pantheon