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Voices from a Reliquary

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Award of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) at the School of Language and Literature Edith Cowan University

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"Voices from a Reliquary" is a series of six short stories drawn from genealogical research. The stories explore historical events and issues which affected the family. Two main thematical bases of the stories are the power of the historical relic and the life transforming effect of journeys. Major theoretical issues considered within the work are the relationship between historical-biographical narrative and the cognitive processes of memory. My narrative style seeks to imitate these cognitive processes, mainly through the use of what Bakhtin termed "polyphonic" narrative.

Research for the stories was gathered from letters and interviews with surviving family members. Photographs, personal documents and belongings were used to support the information. Additional research was gathered from Western Australian State Archives and my own journeys to the locations involved.

"The Little Match Girl" deals with the mystery surrounding the origins of my own great grandmother. Her life has become a family legend, almost folklore and the traditional tale is used as a vehicle to explore the enigma of the orphaned great grandmother.

"The Reliquary" and "The Red Cat and the Postman" deal with the difficulties faced by Italian people immigrating into Australia and the subsequent assimilation and dilution of tradition. "Holyoake, 1961" pieces together anecdotes to reconstruct the family's experience during the 1961 bushfires which destroyed Dwellingup and many small towns in the area. This piece uses research gathered from newspapers and reference material in the State Archives. All three of these stories involved visits to the sites and interviews. Relics used within the stories are full of power and symbolism and are given meaning beyond their material existence because of their links to previous generations, homes and homelands.
"The Movement of a Body Over Earth" was inspired by a reading of Shelley's poem "To a Skylark". This story deals with a boy's inherent wanderlust and the childhood journeys he makes to satisfy his desire for movement. It is a "rites of passage" story. The restoration project acts as a catalyst for fulfilment of his ultimate dream of freedom and movement through travelling around the world.

"A Face Around the Edges" reconstructs the life of a young man through the point of view of his older cousin. She sees his happy childhood and then, after a long absence, she sees him as a young man suffering from mental illness who eventually succumbs. Additional research into Electric Shock Treatment during the 1950s and 1960s is used to add a harshly real edge to the story.
I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

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Date
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The Little Match Girl

after a tale by Hans Christian Andersen

In England, children made matchboxes in work rooms made of wood with gaps for the light and the chills to come through. The children were dirty on the wooden floors and their pupils were large from the darkness inside. The girl was three years old when she began pasting sandpaper onto matchboxes. She was wild eyed and wore her dark hair in a tangle. Nobody knew her name and she did not have the language to tell them. Sometimes she would cry and her tears washed clean streaks down her cheeks and chin. She would work until the night came, then she would search the silent market and the damp streets for food. People gave sometimes because she was just a little girl but often she slept under a basket in the market and felt her bones hard against the cobblestones. Somewhere in her instincts, she could feel warm arms around her and remember the smell of someone who loved her.

When she was five, she was serious and sad. Her rough fingers bent wood for matchboxes, sanded off the splinters and covered them with paper. When she had bent 280 boxes, she was given three farthings and her pale face disappeared from the dark matchbox room.

In Victoria's England they cleaned up urchin children and gave them new clothes. Annie Macpherson and Dr Barnardo took them away from the matchbox rooms and the cholera and cleaned them up and made them demure. Perhaps she was with them or at another Emigration Home in Birmingham or London. The children left on trains at 8.30pm and arrived in Liverpool at 4am where they boarded a ship. Perhaps she was on the Peruvian bound for Montreal but she never worked with the other orphans growing vegetables for the Empire.
There was a little Girl child who had neither a mother nor a father and she lived in a dark forest. There was a village at the edge of the forest and she had learned she could buy matches for a half-penny there and that she could sell them on the street for a full penny. If she sold enough matches, she could buy a crust of bread, return to her lean-to in the forest and sleep there dressed in all the clothes she owned. Somewhere in her instincts, she could feel warm arms around her and remember the smell of someone who loved her. She remembered the movement of a train and the splash of the ocean against the hull of a ship.

The winter came and it was very cold. She had no shoes and her coat was so thin she could see through it. It was 1890, she was seven years old and she wore her dark hair in a tangle. Her feet were past the point of being blue, her toes were white; so were her fingers and the end of her nose. She wandered the streets and begged strangers, would they please buy matches from her? They did not understand because she did not speak their language. No one stopped and no one paid her any attention.

So she sat down one evening saying, "I have matches. I can light a fire and I can warm myself." But she had no kindling and no wood. She decided to light the matches anyway. One match after the other burned down to her fingers but she was a little warmer and she had made light in the dark forest that someone had seen.

The man smelled sour and he coughed. The little match girl could see his knotted yellow hair and his big nose in the glow of her match. He smiled at her and gave her a carrot that snapped in her mouth. He pulled dry sticks from a bag on his back and built a fire beside her lean-to. The match girl thanked him for the carrot and hugged her legs by the fire. He did not understand her language and she was a little afraid of the sour smelling man.
The man did not hurt the little match girl. He took her away from the dark forest and they walked together down the dirt roads of the Colony. She was always silent and he always gave her food and lit fires in the forests.

One day they were passing through a village and they met a gentleman. The match girl could not understand his language but he spoke to the tramp and they had a conversation.

— I cannot understand a word of her gibberish and now she has turned silent.
— She is a dark little thing, perhaps it is Spanish she speaks or maybe she is Welsh or speaks the Gaelic tongue. Where are you from, little match girl?
— Will you take her, Sir? I cannot feed two mouths with my lowly means.
— Indeed. I shall find a place for her in my family. We cannot leave the little barefoot thing to starve or be eaten by wolves.

The gentleman lifted the little match girl up into the front seat of his cart and shook hands with the tramp. She peered back at them but she could not see if money had been exchanged.

The gentleman climbed up beside her and they rode away. He spoke to her and tested different languages that he knew but she could not understand. As midday approached, they drove into a village. The man tied up his horses and opened the back of his cart. He sold strange bottles of coloured liquids, lotions and round pills. The cart was filled with boxes and jars and he said they were medicine. People came to him and he would explain the concoctions and demonstrate the application of the liniments. The native people had shown him some of their remedies and he gathered leaves and berries for these teas and tinctures from the plants in the forest. He had travelled deep into the heart of the Colony and sometimes he ventured along undiscovered rivers and unmapped mountains. He brought medicines to the coastal settlers and they would gasp at the strange smells and be amazed at the curative powers of the concoctions. People called him "Doctor" but his name was really Henry.
In the mid afternoon, Henry closed the doors of his cart and took the match girl by the hand. They walked through a door with a bell and into a wondrous shop with rolls of fabrics and coats and dresses hanging in the window. The woman in the shop gave the little girl some stockings and Henry bent over with a brand new pair of black boots and laced them up around her thin ankles. He bought her a cape and a blue dress with a bow at the throat and buttons. The woman took her to a room with measuring tapes and scraps of fabric on a table and combed the tangle from her dark hair and helped her dress in the beautiful new clothes. They returned to the cart and rode away into the wind.

Her new life began in a big white house in a field of wheat in Chile. Henry's daughter Ada became her new mother and named her Elizabeth and she learned to milk cows and speak a new language. Everyone forgot she was a little match girl and eventually she also forgot. She worked and she ate and she grew and she tied back her hair. When she was eighteen, she married Henry's son. He chose to wander and she wandered too.

When she was seventy she was an old woman and she could not remember her language or her real name. She remembered the movement of a train and the splash of the ocean against the hull of a ship. She remembered saying to herself, "I have matches. I can light a fire and I can warm myself." But she had no kindling or wood. She decided to light the matches anyway.

When she lit the first match, she saw the violets in her garden and smelt their perfume in the sun. She reached out to pick the flowers, but they faded too fast. In the glow of the second match, she was travelling to Canada with a baby inside her and a husband and growing wheat on the prairies. She remembered the shine in the eyes of fourteen babies and seeing it sputter and freeze in the six that died. When the light went out, she was still old so she lit another match.
In the light of the third match, she was nailing calico over the windows of her farmhouse because they had no money for glass. She was milking cows in Australia. She rode in a Model "T" Ford truck with sons and daughters and laid out a picnic by a green river. The vision faded, so she struck another match.

She could feel warm arms around her and remember the smell of someone who loved her. The vision came closer and she saw a face and it was her grandmother. She felt so happy to see her. She had forgotten her soft face and thought she had left her forever. One match after another burnt down to her fingers. She wanted to keep the grandmother with her. The vision began to fade so she struck each of the matches in the box until the last glow had gone.

The dead woman lay between snow white sheets with a matchbox and blackened matchsticks spread all around the bed. Her head rested on her hair as if it were a tangled cushion and her wild eyes still glistened in a shaft of dawn light slicing in between the curtains. When she was old, the little match girl died in a Home for the Aged in Western Australia. The Certificate said the cause of death was "cardiac failure" and named her Elizabeth.
The Reliquary

Caterina has a kitchen made of corrugated iron and it stands between the chickens and the oranges. We shelter from the drizzle with our loquats and spit shiny seeds into the long grass. There is a rusty paint tin in the corner filled with sawdust soaked in kerosene and a big silver spoon for scooping it to wrap and burn inside the green stove. Caterina's apron pulls tight and high over her dome belly and she lights a fire. Everyone is here and we are picking things and cutting back the trees and vines and we can hear them speaking English and Italian all at once and Caterina calling out a scramble of the two, her family code. Someone is dying.

The giant silver kettle bubbles at the back of the stove and Caterina stirs the sauce in her terracotta pan. The outside is black and encrusted and the base is thin like an eggshell. She brought this one in her cases on the ship in 1954, all alone with her babies for three weeks crossing oceans and seas.

Her husband is dying and everyone has gone. We two, brother and sister, spit loquat seeds into the grass in silence in drizzle.

— We should take him something so he can feel at home.
— He can't see.
— Let's take him something to smell so he can die here in his memory.

The first, hard figs of spring smell thick sweet of pollination and loquats and olive branches are home and fennel makes me hungry. They all look fine in a glass vase in the hospital by his bed but their perfume does not cover the smell of white and he drags his skeleton down the hallway, trying to go home in the dark. A man becomes a body.

In 1963, he carved a spoon on a summer night. Down in the orchard, a branch of the almond tree had fallen to the ground. He looked at the curve and examined it for
weaknesses and he carried it to the long stool beneath the fig tree. He started carving into the branch with his little sharp knife. Nobody watched him do it, they all talked and somebody cut open a watermelon. He did not imagine or plan because his instinct remembered the map and the branch became a spoon in the moonlight when the watermelon was gone. He was Antonio and he carved a diamond detail on the handle with his knife. Caterina used the spoon to stir goat's milk into cheese in her corrugated kitchen.

We eat loquats there when he is dead and pick up the spoon with sticky fingers to keep as a relic. In the treasury of St Blaise's City in bullet wounded Croatia, there is a piece of wood. It is locked behind an iron grate with three keys and protected under glass with mysterious chemicals. They say this relic is a piece of the real Crucifix and they house it in a golden filigree cross held by winged angels staring at the dome of the Treasury roof. Our reliquary isn't a Baroque church or locked with three keys; it rusts as the rain runs between the corrugations and fills the drum where we wash the juice from our hands. Antonio died one week before he turned ninety three.

He was born in October 1904 when the Calabrian sunshine ripens the persimmons into perfect red gooiness and olives weigh down the branches. The first rains pour down the mountains and the river pulls at the washing sheets. Teresa was Antonio's mother and she pounded her sheets on rocks by the river's edge. Her brown arms were tight with muscles built from rubbing pig-fat soap into clothes and sheets and lifting the terracotta amphora onto her head for the walk from the spring to her mountain home. She longed to sit beneath the oak tree by the little group of stone houses they called Piticanne but right now she was at the bottom of the mountain and her sheets were floating downstream. Pains were dragging her down into the gurgling river and she reaches for her sheets. Her body curls up in the water. She cries out from the pains and the baby is moving downward, down onto the stony river bed. He surges into the current and floats downstream, pulling on his umbilical lifeline. He wants to go, to float in Mediterranean
mother fluid, forever in the uterus of Calypso's sea. Teresa clasps the cord and ree us into her breast, holds him close and whispers his name to the river - - Antonio. She lies on the washing stones in the sun, and rests her head on the unwashed clothes.

There is a legend told to loquat-seed-spitters of a man named Giuseppe who had a son named Vincenzo, father of Antonio. It is the legend of the oak giant of Piticanne. Giuseppe worked at digging on the mountain side in the hard limestone soil. He was building a foundation. Piticanne was his vision and this was the beginning of the little family community. The houses would be stone, like all the others gripping on the mountain slopes, with terracotta roof tiles and oak doors. He would link them all together with stone paths and lay a cobbled courtyard in between for meals and conversations and they would look over the valleys and the river and he would plant an olive over there and an almond over here and he thought about this in the sun, digging a hole.

He watched his brown hands in the pale soil as they grasped the objects and exhumed the bones and he swore softly in amazement, then called to his brothers and cousins and assisting uncles to come and see what the mountain had been hiding. There was a tomb and in the tomb there were relics and bones.

Giuseppe measured the human leg bone against his own hairy, muscular one and judged himself to be waist height to the exhumed human. The terracotta cup was cracked but the bowl was intact and painted with black brushstrokes and the iron spoon had a snake cast in the handle; they all seemed remarkably oversized. The workers were in awe and they imagined the great fists of a giant drinking wine from this cup on the side of their mountain. The story is still legend long after the relics have submerged. An ochre coloured Madonna and Child were sketched onto the wall of the house Giuseppe built.
in Piticann. There is a blue star on the Lady's right shoulder and huge golden wings spread behind. Perhaps these wings are the angel of the oak giant protecting Piticanne.

Antonio was a child in this place. His brother Ilario left in 1907 and travelled to America for a richer life. Antonio was just three and he remembered his brother in black and white, leaning against broad hand cut fence rails and wearing an American hat.

In a whitewashed church, a Byzantine Christ looks out from his perfectly round halo. His robes are rich red and blue and his cushioned throne is gold and carved. The saints at his sides gaze sweetly at Antonio and his bride with the serious eyes. She is Caterina and she is fifteen. She has woven fine sheets for their wedding bed and hand stitched little flowers across the fold. She cut the stems of flax herself and soaked them in the river, tied to her washing stone. She beat them and spun them as fine as she could and every night when the house was still and all the dishes were done, she would sit at her loom and pass the fine threads through the strings, back and forth making once-only sheets for this night in July 1928.

Now Caterina has grown old and hobbling, these sheets are locked up as relics in a linen chest. Her eldest daughter unfolds them on her kitchen table to show the stained patch of Caterina's blood to the loquat-seed-spitters. They sit at the long table with a bowl of gold-green oil and sambuco flowers. Their fingers mingle in oil with warm bread. They are in Casa Vetere and not much at all has changed from the legends.

Antonio and Caterina lived in her mother's ancient house called Casa Vetere. It was 1929. Antonio drove his cart with crushed pips across the river every day and returned. A bullock pulled the round stone around in circles, the stone turned and crushed the
ill olives and pips. Dark oil trickled into terracotta urns and tiny bubbles rose and crackled at the surface.

One of these giant urns sat silent under the oak floor of Casa Vetere. Caterina filled a glass bottle with the gold-green liquid and clamped the white porcelain stopper with slippery fingers. She poured the oil into a white bowl and crushed yellow flowers of sambuco into the liquid. Its liquorice smell filled the one room of their home and when the round loaves were drawn from the oven, little fingers dipped and mingled in the oil and soaked the hot bread deliciously.

Antonio carved an almond branch into a spoon with his little knife and Caterina used it to stir the milk into cheese. It's still there amongst the detritus of what they left behind.

There is a legend told to descendants of Antonio and Caterina. This is the legend of olive bread and it grew from a time of great deprivation in Calabria. The family were thin and ragged and worked hard to stop the emergence of skeletal features on their faces. Antonio could not offer all of his wealth to buy flour for bread. So, the mountain villagers pounded the dry pips of olives after the oil was extracted and made a powdery brown flour to bake their bread. This bread was coarse and hard and rose in the gut like an albatross. It carried them far away on its great wings, across the sea to a new land where they found soft, white flour with ease.

Days of cutting, nights of weaving. He cut cane, she cut flax. They soaked and softened and she was spinning and he was splitting the cane into flat lengths. He used his little knife and wove baskets. She used her knife and wove the flax into clothes and blankets and tea towels. He wove a ceiling for the ancient house. In the silence of the night they were weaving.
Antonio and Caterina had ten children curled up sleeping in Casa Vetere. One winter brought pneumonia and Antonio carried the four-year-old boy in his arms and walked in the dark. The mountain tracks were steep and slippery and his feet sunk deep into the mud. The little boy wheezed in the cold air. The father thought only of the doctor on the mountain top. Rain slashed at his cheek and the wind drove it faster. There were no leaves on the almond trees but Antonio rested a moment on the still side of the trunk. He turned the face of his cold little boy, unnaturally cold now, and gazed into still, fixed eyes. He sat all night with a dead boy in his arms and, as dawn showed, he slopped back down the muddy trails to Caterina.

Days of planting and harvesting, baking, storing and preserving but there was always less. Their lives were sparse and one day there was olive bread, which stirred the wings of emigration. Deprivation drove them to leave and leave behind. Antonio sailed alone to Australia in 1949 where he planted lots of fruit trees, including a loquat.

Caterina could not feed nine children on the produce of Casa Vetere and they lived only on beans and onions. Three boys went to Australia to help Antonio build a new home and Caterina decided her eldest daughter would marry to ease the burdens of survival. She searched briefly for a husband. She found the son of her sister.

He was cursed with enormous, outward pointing feet and a small, twisted body. His large, bulging eyes faced east and west at once, as if seeking out the boy who threw stones with such accuracy as he wandered past Casa Vetere. He thought in small loops which travelled to familiar places over and over. He looped from breakfast to wine glasses to senseless ranting and back to breakfast every day of his life.

Caterina's eldest daughter was the tallest and most elegant girl in the family. She wore her hair in dark Indian braids and spent her days caring for her younger brothers and
sisters. Her nights were spent embroidering fine mauve flowers and twisting vines onto the homespun linen her mother made. She was well respected for her calm nature and sharp intellect and she desperately did not want to marry the man. Her protests were useless.

The frog husband did not emigrate and the eldest daughter was left behind in the detritus of Casa Vetere with a disused loom, some baskets and a spoon carved from an almond branch for stirring goat's milk into cheese.

In 1954, the *Oceania* carried six passengers for Antonio from the mountainside in Calabria to Australia. Waves had rock-a-byed their sadness into a quiet corner of the heart and what was left behind became memory and legend.

At the cooling hour, when shadows are stretching around the corrugated kitchen, we stand in the doorway and think of the changing tense which death brings. Is becoming was, does changing to did in the time it took for our shadows to shrink and stretch to the chicken house. We spat loquat seeds into the long grass.

Two handles rest on a wooden shelf at eye height to a small grandmother. We look at them together, side by side and take the handles in our hands in the fading day.

— That's them. These knives are our grandparents.

— Look how sharp they still are.

The one with the wooden handle is held together with red wire and worn smooth. The wood has darkened with the sweats and cells of palms and the dirt of days spent working and weaving and planting and cutting back. The knife is long and the blade is fine and worn down to a narrow strip of metal. The silver knife is strong and beautiful with flowers on the handle and curlicues swirling to the hilt. It has the same dark
residue and the blade has been sharpened and ground down so often that only a stub of it remains. One is tall, the other is short. As one has narrowed, the other has shrunk.

They have been worn down by their labour. They just can't do very much more.

I will keep them as a relic for my mantelpiece.

Antonio died today and Caterina has gone away. The objects that they used have transformed into relics to speak their lives to the future. We pick some more loquats and spit the seeds into the long grass. The corrugated kitchen rusts all around us in the drizzle.

In a different time zone, the eldest daughter cries quietly in an abandoned house.
Holyoake, 1961

Concrete steps lead up to where a house once stood. They remain, a solitary monument in the bush and they soak up the sun and I sit while they warm me through my dress.

My skin is tender and I am wide-eyed eleven in the wreckage of Holyoake town. The name awes me with tales of a dreamy childhood and the bushfire that consumed this house and my grandparents' shop in 1961. My Mum's golden head is weighed with memories and bends in the sun. She scatters her history like seeds. Parts of the garden have grown through the ashes and rubble, bushes thicken and grow over the past.

— We lived in a grey weatherboard house with collected gramophones and a picture of your Grandfather Sid when he was a boy in a sailor's suit in Saskatchewan. Our shop had a Bushell's sign over it and no real name. We sold chocolate and weighed bags of peanut biscuits from a big tin and we had bowsers for petrol and kerosene. (They exploded one summer, so hotly it melted the glasses and tea cups.)

— This was a twisted wisteria that once dripped with pink-mauve bunches of flowers. They fell and carpeted the yard and made this an enchanted land to me. These new shoots were born from deep within the earth where soil encloses roots and holds them safe from the inferno. Shall we dig up a piece and plant it at home? We can wait for a new blossoming.

— I had a garden with violets and radishes here when I was a schoolgirl and a dog named Buster and fish ponds full of algae. I used to love running my fingers through the long strings of its slimy greenness.

She is tearful as she tells me this and we walk beneath the Jacarandas where she learned to read. The white wooden school was tinder dry amongst these trees when the flames burst through the door of the classroom. The children were gone.
I loved Holyoake. My room was big and had green lino with roses on it, a blue chair and a sash window. Mum and Dad bought me a blue radio with all the spare change from the shop. It had batteries, which was a luxury for me in those days. I used to pick it up at Sam from the blue chair and take it when we went fishing at the bend in the river where we never caught any fish.

I loved Richie Valens and I collected Women's Weekly posters and sticky taped them round my walls with Frankie Avalon's face, like a dado.

(Sticky tape melts so fast, probably before the flames even got to her room the posters would have loosened and drifted onto the lino.)

My Grandmother lived in Holyoake too; her name is Jean. Sometimes she sold the chocolate in the shop - other times she ate it and smudged it on her romance novels. She took my mother, Margaret, and Sid to live there in 1954 and made the house cosy and made dinners for three and looked out at the trees and the creek at the bottom of their hill. The men who worked in the mill across the creek would come to the shop with no name and buy bottles of Coke from Jean and the paper and rationed tobacco, while my Mum was at school or running through the trees or kneeling down picking purple orchids to press in the thick pages of her books which turned to ashes and smoke on January 24th 1961.

People read about the fire the next day on the front page of the "Daily News". Raw-eyed, blackened and utterly weary people told of the worst night of terror in WA history as the inferno roared on the town. People fled for their lives leaving everything behind as a hurricane force wind turned the town into an inferno.

Jean made delicious Apricot Fingers with melt-in-your-mouth pastry and a foamy sweet marshmallow topping made from four ounces of white marshmallows, milk and egg whites. She kept it in a purple tin with greaseproof paper. Sometimes she would leave Sid in the shop and carry the tin down the gravel road and across to her Mother's house.
by the creek. Jean's Mother was called Dolly by all the family. She came out from England with a metal trunk in 1912 and it was full of jewellery, lace and photos that burned when the fire went through. Dolly lived with her aged mother and they did not believe the place would burn. She made a pot of tea to have with the Apricot Fingers. They had heard it on the news for days that there was a fire in the hills but the men had it under control. They did not need to leave.

Jean made salad for dinner at 5.30pm and they could hear the roar of the fire as they sat at the table in silence. The sound echoed in Margaret's belly and vibrated through her cells. It filled her with its roaring and rattled her insides. The dishes were still there when the petrol ignited under the shop.

They drove away in their green Austin, Sid and Margaret, Jean with the budgie on her knee, Dolly and her mother but not Buster. They drove down the gravel road to Dwellingup. No space in the car for the dog. It was a desperate rush. There was no time to think. Jean packed blankets and clothes and Margaret took two china angels and a panda bear with orange eyes, all stuffed with crackly straw. She didn't bring any clothes. She was upset and silent. She was sixteen.

Sid and Jean drank lemonade at the Dwellingup shop. They had lemonade in their own shop, at home. He was going to go back and get the dog and the ute and they would wait on the oval with everyone else. It was after 6 o'clock when they heard an explosion and looked down the gravel road. They could hear the roar of Holyoake on fire. The wind was strong, the fire was coming their way. Jean's hair whipped against her cheeks in warm gusts which seemed to be blowing her down the gravel road and onto the bitumen and out of that fear where it was really happening after all. The postmistress was right when she told them to leave. Leave it all behind she said and drive for your lives but Jean did not believe it until she saw her burnt out fridge and all her beautiful china melted together and the huge trees gone.
Sid thought about this occasionally, years later when he was holding his knife and fork in a lovely laminex kitchen. Sometime later he would tap the ash from his pipe onto a cracked red step and plan to build a doll’s house but in January 1961, he pulled up his trousers, tightened his braces and grasped the steering wheel of his green Austin thinking he would rather stay on the oval in Dwellingup with everyone else. Jean wanted to get out. He was afraid and nobody was leaving with them down the smoky road in the dark. He thought of his girl Jean, smiling in her war-time shoes by a water tank, her legs so small and definite. He saw the panic wriggling wildly in her blue eyes and drove away. They were the last car to leave Dwellingup that night.

Jean’s legs are still beautiful when she tells me her stories, even with varicose veins curling worms and rivers over her sexy knees. The budgie sat on them in his cage inside the hot car down the road to Pinjarra. Jean’s chest was tight with screams and anxiety and fear which pressed in all around her in the thick smoke and she could not stop screaming and screaming at the windscreen nightmare. The trees were blazing all around. She heard the noise of engines and machines trying to extinguish the forest but the fiery roar was louder and the wind blew wildly and the flames chased them down the road with furious crackling. The car was a hot oven. Sid squinted in the smoke and could barely see to guide the green Austin as fast as it could go and branches fell and burnt behind and all around and flames raged either side down that long, descending road.

His daughter sat silent beside him, she could smell his tobacco smell even through this smoke while her face grew red and blistering from the heat inside the car. She listened to the falling trees, the crackling, roaring, screaming fire all around her and thought of driving down the hill to home and Buster. Not long ago, she stood with lemonade like a roadside angel in Dwellingup and looked down the gravel road and heard the explosion that must have been the reservoir of petrol and kerosene in the shop with no name and saw the tall jarrah trees light up.
The next morning, Margaret stared into her red and peeling face, still warm and numb and soaking in Skin Repair in the round mirror on Aunty Iris' pink bathroom wall.

People read about the horror in the papers while her heart was twisting. She hoped that Buster was alive. She hoped he stood in the creek and his howling was echoing through silent, smoky Holyoake. Her heart hoped for three days.

Then, on the fourth day, Sid drove them back home. Ransackers had already fiddled in the debris, kicking the hot metal and glass, finding an axehead, blistering fingertips.

The ground was still hot and Jean found her silver thimble, black with soot. Margaret ran to the creek. He wasn’t there and her heart sank and she screamed when they found him all curled up and dead and shaped like a dog but just a pile of ashes all safe and sound under Jean’s burnt out iron bed where he would hide when he was really scared, where he felt really safe but he wasn’t. Margaret’s heart was haunted and angry and all she could smell was the cold blackness of ash. Everywhere there was ash.

The fire was so hot that the bricks of the chimney turned to powder. There were few relics. Margaret picked up a melted piece of clear glass and kept it with her. Jean polished her silver thimble and handed it to me one day. Black soot is still trapped in the thimble’s engravings, like evidence to support the history which disappears under regrown bush. There wasn’t much else left, just the back steps which have soaked up the sun and become a warm place to sit. Runners of wisteria search for something to climb. We dig up a piece and plant it at home.
The Red Cat and the Postman

In the sun of a country town morning he spoke in an accent too lyrical for the dry air of this place. The people around spoke the Queen's English properly in tones that were flat and didn't end their words with an 'a' or an 'o' and they called him a Ding and said that he was greasy and he should go back to Italy and eat spaghetti where he belonged and weren't the Italians on Hitler's side during the War? The people said Dings have criminal minds and carry flick-knives in their pockets and drink too much vino and have obscene amounts of children. The people said Dings will overcrowd this country with dark hair and olive skin and turn us all into Roman Catholics fiddling with rosary beads and muttering superstitious words to Saint Anthony as they wander between their olive trees and eat smelly cheese in our country. The people said Dings would steal their land, then come and steal their daughters.

In the sun of a country town morning he carried a box with tomatoes, 2 lettuce, a pound of carrots and a lemon. He walked from the back door of the general store where he worked, to the red back door of the Red Cat cafe. The man with the pretty young daughter cursed "Bloody Dings" in a mumble when he heard the lyrical accent of the young man and shook his head. He never knew the young man had spoken to his daughter before. They had already lived a moment that would survive as an elevated memory, bathed in sunshine for all their lives.

I met him outside the Red Cat. He was dark and charming and I knew I would marry him from the moment I saw him walking towards the cafe with a box of vegetables in his arms.

My Dad left me in his ute under the Morton Bay fig trees and he walked up the gravel rise to the Red Cat as he usually did. My parents owned the Red Cat. I worked there as a waitress. I sat for a moment and peered at the young man with the confident strut
and stepped onto the gravel. My feet floated over the ground and I felt a moment of recognition of my destiny.

He came back every day and I waited for our meetings. They made my day.
Sometimes he would appear through the front door of the cafe while I was wiping the sandwich crumbs from a red laminex table and I would startle and smile and serve him.

--- Can I help You? What would you like? Can I make you a sandwich, perhaps?
--- No, thank you. Just a bottle of Passion and an ice-a-cream today.

Then he smiled widely across his face and his eyes sparkled and I would turn to liquid inside and prop myself up against the counter so I didn’t swoon.

In the chill of a country town evening they went on their first date. People said she would be barefoot-and-pregnant before-they-knew-it and his bambinos would be screaming in her ears while her poor-bloody-father cried himself to sleep. The young man was delighted that he had won a date with the girl despite her father’s well-known hatred for his race.

**Dad kicked up a big fuss.**

— You’re not going out anymore, that’s it! I won’t have my daughter going out with a bloody Ding.

— I’m going out with him anyway. It doesn’t matter what you say. I’ll just leave home if you don’t let me go.

He wouldn’t speak to me after his outburst. It was truly awful and it spoiled a time that was otherwise very happy for me.

We met outside the hall in the country town. They used to show pictures there on a Thursday night. He strode up to me with his big smile and his air of confidence and the scene of the argument disappeared from my mind. He was always a snappy dresser with his black stove-pipes, white socks and winkle-pickers and he bought a bottle of
Passiona, as usual. I felt very comfortable sitting with him, sipping the bubbly drink from the same bottle and watching Elvis in the hall.

I lived out of town quite a way, so I used to stay with my Grandmother when I went out and he walked with me back to her house where he shook my hand and said Good Night. We had a second date and a third date and more and it was always Elvis in the hall on a Thursday night. He loved Elvis and he used to serenade me on the walk to my Grandmother's house: "One by one the stars appear that twinkle in your eyes...Who'd believe that we'd be here, so near to Paradise...This could be the kissssss to unlock Heaven's door, that magic hour of blissssss that we've both waited for, I love you more and more". Then he shook my hand and said Good Night.

Across her kitchen table a Grandmother spun a tale and tossed it across to her son-in-law who hated Italians. It fed his anger and he threw a tale about the bloody Dings back across the table. In this way they played, to and fro, above the autumn leaf plate of Lemon Cream biscuits and Lipton's tea. Back and forth in a game of rumour, whisperings and say-so.

— I never dreamed she would do such a thing. Under the light post outside my own house. Made me blush.

— She has embarrassed the whole family. My own brother has disowned me for the shame of it. We are well respected around here you know and she has no place playing around with a bloody Italian.

— I'd put a stop to it if I were you, you're her father. From what I saw outside my own front door he'll get her in to trouble before we know it and she'll never see her Latin lover again. Then she'll be sorry, the little tart, and who do you think she'll be crying to for help?

— I'll kill the bastard before that happens!

The Grandmother played a game with the innocent couple and the furious father. The country town people gossiped and giggled at the unfolding drama.
We'd only been seeing each other for a few weeks when he went away to work. I missed his cheerful face buying Passiona from me at the Red Cat. My Dad was delighted that "that Ding bloke" wouldn't be loitering in the doorways and windows of his cafe anymore. Since all the problems started, I didn't want to loiter there any longer either and I was waiting very impatiently for my placement as a trainee nurse to be approved.

Every week I received a note in the post: "See you at the pictures Thursday, love G." My Dad's voice would boom through the kitchen every Thursday and then he was silent for the rest of the week and never spoke to me at all. I felt sorry for Mum, she was caught in the middle. It must have been very difficult for her.

One day my love drove up the driveway of my parents' house in a highly polished, green Morris Minor. I was delighted but as he walked through the front door, Dad walked out the back door.

"Fun in Acapulco", "Clambake", "Blue Hawaii": Thursdays were a festival of romance and Elvis. Now that he had a car, he would collect me and take me home. I felt so liberated. I didn't have to endure Friday morning porridge with my Grandmother and her autumn leaf dinner set anymore.

In the sun of a country town morning the waitress' father could barely contain his rage when he saw the dark haired young postman rest his black bicycle against the red verandah post of the cafe.

— Just a bottle of Passiona and an ice-a-cream today thank you. Oh, and here is your mail.

Her father cursed under his breath and marched out the back door shaking his head.

— I thought I'd got rid of that Ding from my shop and now he's come back as the bloody postie! He just won't give up.
He grabbed furiously at the Lemon Cream biscuits on the autumn leaf plate and slurped his tea noisily with the passion of his anger.

---

What can I do? She's determined to go against my will and I don't trust him, always leering at her and he's even been making himself welcome in my house.

---

Yes, yes, they learn vile ways from a young age. I've heard that their towns are all full of dirty statues with their private parts on display for all the world to see.

---

What worries me are the tales I've heard of Italians belting up their wives. The thought of my girl working her fingers to the bone, cooking spaghetti and looking after his bloody family, getting a hiding every night, it's enough to...

---

Don't cry, love, I'll make us another pot of tea.

I was placed as a nurse in the next town south along the highway, where his family lived. The hospital was right next to the post office, so we saw each other every day. I went to live in the nurses' quarters and he used to pick me up in his green Morris Minor when my shift finished. Sometimes we'd drive up to the dam and go swimming or for long walks in the bush. We were best friends and we loved to talk and dream and make plans together.

His father worked at the hospital and we became good friends too. He spoke English very well and he was a charmer, always greeted me with a smile. Two other Australian girls had married into his family and the young Italian sisters were delighted to have me around. I was interested in fashion and dressing up and we had lots of fun together. It was the sixties, rules were being broken and I enjoyed breaking some of them. My short hem lines and tight shorts were the cause of much speculation about my virtue. In the country towns, people didn't trust changing fashions or rebellious girls with Italian boyfriends.

I used to go home on my days off and a couple of times I asked him over for dinner.

Dad wouldn't talk to him at all. Mum and Dad used to eat in the kitchen while we ate in
the lounge room. He tried to break the ice a few times by helping my father out fixing
the fences or talking about the calves or the vegetable patch. Things got a little better,
but it was still tense. We'd been seeing each other for four years when we got engaged.

— Did you read the notice in the paper? "Mr and Mrs have much pleasure in
announcing the engagement of their only daughter..." I'm sure they did! It's no
secret how he feels.

— Mrs S. says she saw her old man marching off down the back paddock the night he
heard the news. He had the shot gun over his shoulder, ready to blow his head off.
Then she saw him come back next morning all in one piece.

— I suppose he's not too bad as far as Dings go. He always gives me a cheery hello
when he drops my letters in the box.

— Yes, I've heard her mother quite likes him. He laid the concrete for a new hearth
in her place and did a lovely job from what they've said. Some of them aren't too
bad, you know.

I was happy. Dad's attitude really upset me but I had hardened myself to his behaviour.
We had a big party in the hall. Posters of Elvis in "Girl Happy" were stuck on the walls
and his music made the floor boards shake. The records sang out into the street and we
danced and had a wonderful time. It was a blur. I went back to the nurses' quarters
that night with a spinning head and "Oh Oh I love you so, Ah Ah I can't let you go, Oo
Oo don't tell me no, I need your love tonight" repeating over and over. My feet ached
from dancing in high heels.

I asked his two younger sisters to be my bridesmaids and we went to the City on the
train and bought my dress and lemon ballerina dresses for them. We had such fun. I
was getting very excited about the wedding and I was very grateful when Uncle C. had
a talk to Dad about his attitude.
In the dimming light of a country town evening, the man and his brother walked through a back paddock engaged in serious conversation. Nobody heard what they said, but everyone supposed there were words of warning from one brother to the other against alienating his only daughter through bigotry. The warning brother probably said that the other brother should be happy if she's happy and that the young man was a hard worker like most Italians and would probably provide very well for his only daughter - so snap out of it, otherwise you'll lose her. Things changed, somewhat, after that conversation and when the young man came by and saw his future father-in-law laying new boards on the verandah, he got out of the car and helped him. He had helped him around the place before, but this time there was more ease and the older man thanked him when they had finished the job.

A few weeks later, the father accompanied his elated daughter down the aisle of the Roman Catholic Church in his country town and gave her away to the young Italian man. Certain members of the bride's family were unable to attend, due perhaps to sudden bilious attacks and viruses that arrived with a shipful of Dings. The groom's favourite hymn resonated in the church. "Venite l'angele, barchetta mia, Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia" Elvis sang it later on the record player at the reception.

They honeymooned by a white beach, then they moved away and bought a little house in Rose Street where they created a magnificent garden.

*Life was really happy for us together. We'd been married for eighteen months when we had a little girl. Dad adored her. One day when he and Mum came down to visit, I was bathing her out on the back lawn. She was playing in the water, splashing and giggling and Dad was watching her with a rare smile on his face.*

— *I love her so much you know, she's beautiful.*

— *And she's half Italian, Dad*
I looked at him in the eyes and he was embarrassed. He looked like he was shaking something out of his head.

Yes, yes, I was wrong.

He never mentioned it again and I didn't either.

In the sun of a country town morning, the old man works in his shed. He saws the wood and hammers nails into the pieces of a rocking turtle he's building for his granddaughter. He carefully files and sandpapers away all the splinters because he wouldn't want her hurting herself. He makes careful note of the distance between the seat and the footrest so her little legs can reach. The turtle rocks back and forth perfectly and he paints it bright green with yellow polka dots and huge dark eyes.

— He keeps his trap shut about all that Ding-hating business these days, doesn't he?
  He's nice as pie. Doesn't say a word.

— Yes, but apparently he drives off down south on his own. Mrs S. sees his car coming back at all hours. She calls them his midnight missions. He parks outside the house. Spies on them in the night. Says he likes to keep an eye on his girl. Make sure there's no yelling and screaming. Make sure she's not hiding her bruises.

— I can just see him too. Creeping around, spying through the windows and them munching on their spaghetti, none-the-wiser.

— Apparently, she caught him once. Went out there with the kids to invite him in for a cup of tea and he took off down the road like a bloody maniac.
The Movement of a Body over Earth

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;

— To A Skylark  P.B. Shelley

David was a mover. The family marvelled at his baby steps and he soon stretched his leg over the seat of a green plastic tractor and began to pedal. He loved the shuddering he felt through his feet and lips and belly when he pedalled his tractor down the gravel driveway. He rose and fell and gasped and thrilled at the speeds he could reach and he wanted more. He was in love with movement.

David's Grandmother had a Holden which she had painted apple green with a brush. He and his sister would pull the black brush hairs from the paintwork. He loved to trace his finger across the chrome letters on the side of the car. They said "Special". The springs in the seats were soft and he knew the pattern of bumps on the road into town. David would laugh when the car bounced up and down, the seats would creak and he would squeal with delight.

When he was eight years old, David was bouncing and moving on a brand new purple bike with black rubber grips on the handles and bright yellow suspension springs. He was free to move and travel and he began to explore.

His life became a journey marked by tracks and monuments. The river track led to sunken fishing boats and a colourful wreck with a porthole, which he dreamed of
raising to the surface. When the tide was low, the ribs of a long boat poked from the grey river bed. David waited for those days and he would stand beneath the paperbark trees and imagine sailing away for days in the beautiful slime covered boat.

The dirt track was a thrilling ride of curves and bumps and hollows. Smooth paths of dry mud twisting through a swamp at the end of the street. David's purple bike flicked back the overhanging branches of paperbark from the track. Yellow springs compressed and expanded. He was a coloured blur of velocity.

The tracks which led deep into the bush were the most inspiring of David's early journeys. Fellow wanderers had marked the place with the refuse of movement. Austin, Ford, rusting shells of Morris, chrome names and badges, gears he could change, steering wheels he could turn and soar up into daydream clouds. He collected and pretended. Bits and pieces filled his room, his mind, his cubby house. He loved the shells. If he closed his eyes, he could hear them whispering.

His father had a motor bike when he was seventeen. He said it was a BSA and he didn't have a licence. He told David of the day his bike caught fire in front of his parents' house. Petrol pops and burns. He and his four brothers dug a hole around the burning bike and buried it right there in the front yard. David saw this in his mind, over and over. The roaring motor and the flames and smoke suffocating in the sand, buried alive. David wanted to dig out the relic so badly. He dreamed at night of restoration.

When he was fourteen, he sat in the back seat of his father's blue Ford Fairlane and fixed his finder-eyes out the window. One day, he spotted the peach coloured curves of a vintage fender poking from the corrugated walls of Mr Leach's shed. His heart raced. The Fairlane reversed with a high pitched whine, clunked over the cattle grate and down the gravel driveway.
The corrugated shed was an epitaph to mechanical movement. A baby blue Austin Healey Sprite had a hole through the black vinyl cover. There was a smell of old grease and a rusty tractor. The beautiful Bentley with gas lamps and shiny paintwork was fully restored.

— Its a Ford Ten. 1947. Made just after the war. There's another one for parts if you want it. Been there for years. I'll probably never get around to it. Want to fix up the Austin Healey. Six hundred for the both of them. You can borrow the car trailer.

David's face shone a light brighter than the gleam off the Bentley's chrome. He thrilled at the thought of having greasy black fingernails and a shining vintage car like Mr Leach.

David's peach coloured Ford was still. It rested in his Grandmother's shed and he worked. He loved its curves and its chrome. It smelt of mustiness and old grease and he did too as he worked. He dismantled the old car right down to its skeleton. He stripped all the peach paint and he rust-proofed the metal.

He spent weekends and days after school and had visits from his friends and his brother who would help and chat and look in awe at the relic in the shed. His sister would bring lunch and the dog and they would picnic in the car and talk about his plans for restoration and one day when he would drive his Ford in a vintage car rally. He dreamed and he worked. His fingernails were always black.

David desired movement and the Ford was still. He had worked for months on restoration and enthusiasm turned to restlessness, squirming in his belly. He wanted to drive.
The Ford Ten was heavy. It was old steel, made to endure. It took the combined strength of his parents, his grandmother, his brother and sister and next-door neighbour to push the old Ford out of the garage and up the rise of the lawn into the sun. His father still puffed from the exertion while he connected the jumper leads, red to red, black to black. The Ford would draw the electricity from his blue Fairlane.

David sat in the driver's seat with his sister and her dog beside him and his brother in the back. The key was turned on and he pressed the red start button. Metal scraped, things rumbled and turned. David's feet pumped on the accelerator, clamped on the brake. It tried, the old red button sprang back and forth. So many years of stillness and seizure. He could feel vibrations of movement in the floorpan. It was a thrill, buzzing inside him. He pressed his thumb to the red start button again and it struggled, trying to turn over. The Ford had rested so long. Smoke rose, he could taste petrol fumes and finally there was a roar and he knew he could move. He revved the engine, the red and black leads were disconnected.

David's face shone with gladness and the old Ford lurched forward and rumbled around the clothes hoist. He stopped and clunked into reverse, whirring backward on the lawn. He was moving but he wanted more.

The family loaded the Ford Ten onto Leach's car trailer and towed it back up to his farm. David was so excited. He sat proudly behind the wheel and took off up the gravel road. The thing rattled and drifted all over the place, and it was so slow. It just never moved with the smooth grace of his imagination. That's when he lost interest.

His dream of restoration had caught him up and trapped him in the shed. David's dream became a spider spinning sticky webs around him. It tried to wrap him up, keep him in one place. It demanded stillness, completion, focus on the details. David didn't want its
limitations. The world inside his mind was growing wider. He longed for the freedom of movement.

He scraped the greasy blackness from under his fingernails. He packed all his tools into a red box and let his Ford Ten to be cocooned by webs.

Far away dreams have charmed him. He dreams of journeys and new places. They comfort like a to and fro lullaby, vibrating through his body as he moves across the earth.

Some days David rocks in the berth of a ship. Feels the rushing breeze of the Underground. Climbs narrow stairs, twists up to stoney ramparts. Hears a roaring gush of waterfall interiors, feet slipping on, gripping green rocks. Sings into zebra eyes. Feels the rise and fall of turbulence 18,000 feet above a blue glacier. Runs, spread-eagled, in the face of Atlantic gales. Almost flying, feet above the ground in the wind on the edge of a pale cliff. He soars with the romance of movement. *And singing still
dost soar, and soaring ever singest.*
A Face Around the Edges

Jean was seventeen and she loved spring. She could wear her rosy dresses with short sleeves and ride her bike. She loved to go to the pictures, it would lift her up on wings of dreaming. Sometimes she would rise right out of her seat and float with her cheek pressed up against Nelson Eddy's on the screen. Her favourite film was "Maytime" where he sang buds of romance in the warm sun. Jean would dream of love at the pictures and sing with Nelson while she rode her bike in Australia.

Florence was pregnant in spring and she withered. Her husband was away on military service and she needed lots of care so her sister's daughter Jean would visit and sometimes stay for a few days. Jean would sing Nelson down the road to her Aunt's house and sit with tea watching daffodils, snowdrops, soldier boys popping through the dark earth. The baby was due in May time, which was spring in Hollywood.

In May time Aunty Florence had a fragile boy. Jean would watch his little lips move on the teat of the bottle and rock him side to side. She loved the little thing and she would sing Nelson Eddy in the sun while she pushed his pram down the street and he grew before her eyes. His blonde hair would shine and Jean would talk to him and eventually he talked to Jean. She would ride on her bike in her war-time shoes every day to see her boy Jack.

Jean was engaged to a man on an invisible horse and when she was with Jack, she would turn her ring around to the flat side and practise being married and his mother. When she was with the man, she wore the diamond side and he was her hero. Little Jack was two when Jean got married in a blue dress and went to live with the man and his horse.
One day her Aunty came to visit with the boy. They played all day in the sun. He smiled to feel the calves wrap their rough tongues round his hand and try to swallow him whole. He giggled and sat on the back of the big draught horse which stood like stone, munching. Jean's dog Pete followed them all day and little Jack squealed and played and felt a warm chicken egg in his palm and they were happy. Then shadows stretched and they went to the station and he cried and called and Jean rode away waving and sniffing tears all the way home.

Time continued passing and Jean's belly swelled. Outside her farmhouse, she watched the windmill spin shadows on her soldier boys. Jean had a blonde baby girl in spring and she said she didn't see Jack for years.

*In 1938, an Italian psychiatrist applied a pair of tongs used to stun hogs before slaughter to the temples of a man and shocked him out of a delirious state in which he spoke only gibberish.*

"For years", she said and when she met the handsome young man with the blonde hair he spoke of Morris and Austin and Holden and had tall friends. It was 1959. In the City, he sold cars to people who looked back at him and did not understand and he felt anguish. There were so many things in life he thought he could never be and the dreams of never-be began to eat out tunnels in his heart and brain. He longed to lie in the long grass and feel the sun on his arms and feet and let calves swallow his fingers with their rough tongues, so he went to visit.

*Patients may appear outraged or shocked after receiving the treatment.*

Sometimes he came to visit with his tall friends and they would walk into the hills with their guns and shoot rabbits. Jack would carry the dead rabbits back to the house. The gunshot echoes called to him in the never-be tunnels of his mind. They just wouldn't go
away, they went on and on with maddening repetition. His father said he would never-be. Never-be strong and powerful. Never-be clever. Never-a man. The gunshots would mingle with the critics and the persecutors who lived in the walls of the tunnels. They would haunt him, telling him lies that he believed and destroying all hopes he had that he may ever be.

— You used to think I was special when I was little, didn't you Jean?
— I used to pretend you were my baby and I was very sad when I left you, then I had my own baby.
— You are so lucky Jean.
— One day you will have children of your own to love, Jack.

They stood on the verandah in the dim light of the house. The sky was huge in the summer and night seemed endless warmth. They stood silent in the worlds of their own anguish trying hard to appreciate the night's tranquillity.

_At 17, rock star '*'**** was given shock treatments designed to "cure" his homosexuality at a New York state mental hospital._

The next time she saw him, he looked mad. She was a little frightened of the man who was the boy she loved. His eyes were strange, spinning and not there. She knew he had been to the asylum but she never knew that they stuffed a white rag in his mouth so he wouldn't bite off his tongue. She never knew how many volts jolted through his body. He didn't stay in the hospital for long, but he went back again many times. They would strap him down onto the bed and the Doctor would turn the dials and lights appeared on the machine. The needle on the meter would rise and he would jerk around and his face would turn red and twist unrecognisably. He felt as if his brain was bursting open like a bulb. Maybe he would be a soldier boy when they split him apart.

_They claim that it temporarily lifts depression by causing transient personality changes similar to those seen in head injury patients: euphoria, confusion and memory loss._
She never saw him again, but she heard some stories and others were secrets that the doctors wrote in his file and his parents whispered. The never-be tunnels in Jack's brain were filled with sparks and light. The light was blinding. It hurt. He felt confused. The electrodes were clamped to his head but not to his heart and the darkness was getting wider inside him.

*Anecdotal evidence suggests that confusion and memory loss after treatment may even precipitate suicide in some people.*

He was 22. People thought he was crazy and he began to believe them. He lost hope. The light in his brain was scrambling things. He could feel darkness creeping up inside. He paid all his bills, wrote all the cheques. He sent his mother some flowers for Mother's Day and wrote a cheque for them too.

*In July 1961, Ernest Hemingway shot himself just days after being released from the Clinic, where he received more than twenty shock treatments.*

She got the telegram in May time in 1962. He shot himself. She said he put the gun in his mouth and blew off the top of his head. His father found him in the shed. His mother was sick in bed when he did it and she heard the shot in the night and she felt it in her heart and it echoed there forever. Jean sang Nelson Eddy to herself and made a pot of tea.
Voices from a Reliquary

Critical Essay

1. The archive of stories: historical and personal

*Voices from a Reliquary* is a collection of six short stories based on genealogical research. Material for the stories was gathered from oral accounts, letters, archives, photographs, documents, personal belongings and visits to the sites. Major theoretical issues considered within the work are the relationship between historical-biographical narrative and the cognitive processes of memory. My narrative style seeks to imitate these cognitive processes, mainly through the use of what Bakhtin termed "polyphonic" narrative. The form of the short story has allowed experimentation with narrative styles appropriate to each individual piece.

The Battye Library, which holds the Western Australian State Archives, provided access to newspaper accounts of the Dwellingup bushfires which destroyed Holyoake in 1961. A number of written histories were also available which gave eyewitness accounts. The newspaper archives were also helpful in *The Red Cat and the Postman* where I found out which Elvis film was screening in May 1965 when the young couple were engaged. Their engagement notice from the West Australian was quoted almost directly. Passenger lists for the ship Oceania which arrived in Fremantle in May 1954 were obtained from State Archives and details confirmed for *The Reliquary*.

I also had some experiences of unsuccessful research. Searching for information on the real Elizabeth from *The Little Match Girl*, I searched genealogical internet sites in Saskatchewan, Canada, Chile and England and posted queries on all of the sites. I also questioned every distant relative that may have more information on her life, but found nothing more than the fragments of information on which I based the story. I had various contradictory versions and a couple of photographs.
In researching information for *A Face Around the Edges*, I was unsuccessful in gaining access to medical records from Graylands Hospital for the real "Jack". However, while researching the methods and effects of Electric Shock Treatment from 1958 to 1962, I searched the Internet and found the site for the Washington Post from which I drew the article quotes in the story. I was also led to a reading of asylum stories by Janet Frame who details her experiences of shock treatment.

To evoke an authentic sense of place, I made visits to many of the sites that are the settings for the stories. Within the scope of this collection, I visited the site of Holyoake township and, for *A Face Around the Edges*, I visited Hamel for the farm scenes. I visited Waroona and the original Red Cat building, now a masseuse's rooms. For this story, I also visited the Yarloop Hospital and the town hall and the Waroona Catholic Church. Photographs from my visits prompted my memory. Where I was unable to visit the site, I drew on my own memory or information in letters and interviews. Settings in *The Reliquary* draw on previous visits to Piticanne and Casa Vetere in Calabria, Italy. I found this contact with place vital to my stories. It helped me to give substance to the settings: the smells, sounds and sights at their points of origin.

In addition to photographs of the settings, I also used photographs of people and cars to provide more information for my stories and a sense of the real. I have also collected many documents such as birth and marriage certificates, old receipts and transfers of land.

The initial inspiration for the stories came from my interest in the concept of relics. A relic can be defined as:

*relic*: part of holy person's body or belongings kept after his death as an object of reverence; memento, souvenir, what has survived destruction or wasting, remnant, residue, scraps; surviving trace or memorial of a custom, belief, period, people, &c.; (The Oxford Dictionary, 1976, p. 676)
The relics within the stories are family artefacts. The hand carved wooden spoon and the knives in *The Reliquary* have several uses within the story. They are well-used tools and therefore symbolic of the labour-intensive lifestyle which the peasant Italians lived in Calabria and continued as a tradition after emigrating to Australia. They act as an anchor by which the reader is drawn back to the same image, a repetitive chorus within the story to denote the continuation of tradition and the unchanging lifestyle of the people.

In *Holyoake, 1961* the regrown wisteria is a relic that symbolises the lives rising from the ashes and the survival of life's essence, represented by the roots, protected from destruction. The thimble represents another form of survival. It is a protective object: it protects the fingers from pinpricks and needles. It is so strong it survives the fire that destroys bricks and enormous trees and glass and every other household object but the thimble. The characters give symbolic power to the thimble as a relic because it has survived destruction. It has increased in value because of the historical importance it gains from being the only remaining treasure of the past. The characters also attribute value to the soot, as evidence of the fire. Consequently, the thimble embodies the story of their past and the bushfire, which destroyed their home but which they and the thimble survived.

*The Movement of A Body Over Earth* also uses the power of the relic as a focus for the story. The stillness of the car-wrecks in the bush, the burnt out motorcycle and the peach-coloured Ford Ten act as an impetus for restoration of their former ability to move. The relics of the various vehicles conjure images of potential movement like the restless energy within David, whose ultimate dream of movement around the world must wait until he reaches adulthood.

Written and oral accounts were used to gather information for the stories. These were usually in the form of personal interviews or telephone requests for a written account.
Re-telling of events in retrospect provides unreliable information and, where possible, I sought to confirm details through archival or documentary evidence. Historical ambiguity was not usually allayed and the narrative styles of the stories incorporate the partial absence of historical facts. The issues I encountered in dealing with personal accounts as a source of information for my stories will be discussed in the following section.

2. Memory, re-telling, re-membering and the narrative process

The process of writing historical-biographical narratives using oral or written accounts as a source involves four stages separating actual events from the narrative.

Firstly, the cognitive process of memory, which stores information regarding actual events. Secondly, the cognitive process of re-membering. This is followed by the oral or written process of narrating what is re-membered, which will be referred to as re-telling. Finally, the process of using this information to create a historical-biographical narrative. This will be referred to as the narrative process.

Memory is such a fallible source of historical information; there is such convolution surrounding the actual events, that the term "history" is barely appropriate when referring to what is retold. Memory is selective. What we select from the past is based on its emotional impact upon us. This is known as "affective memory" (Crawford, 1992, p.114) Memory is not a "random sample" but a selective system of storing past events.

Freud's theories postulate that a person retains in the memory childhood events with a strong emotional impact, events that were important and left a lasting impression. Frigga Haug adds "conflict and contradiction" to these, as they require "reflection and
reappraisal". She also adds events of novelty and "unfinished business" to that which is selected for storage in the memory. (Crawford, 1992, pp.153-4)

Remembering is the practice of recalling to mind or recollecting (The Oxford Dictionary, 1976, p. 677), however it is more appropriate to this discussion if viewed in its constitutive parts:

**re**: attachable to any verb or verbal derivative with the senses *once more, again, anew, afresh, repeated back, with return to previous state.*

(The Oxford Dictionary, 1976, p.663)

**member**: distinct part of complex structure

(The Oxford Dictionary, 1976, p.495)

Conceiving the word remember as re-member alters its meaning from "recall to mind, recollect" to "returning a distinct part of a complex structure to its previous state". The "complex structure" in this case can be read as history stored in the memory. Remembering in effect is an antonym for dismember: it is putting something back together. In the case of these stories, family history is being re-membered. This would imply that family history had been dismembered from some original form. Actual events can be defined as what was received by the senses at the point of origin. The cognitive process of memory dismembers actual events from their original form. Remembering interprets the memory and puts some of these pieces back together. According to Worthington, the act of re-membering the past is subject to a variety of influences besides memory:

Historical narratives need not - indeed cannot - have direct correspondence with the past as it *really was*, but rather mediate and modulate the events of the past from a present interpretative moment. In remembering the past, events and actions are set within a framing, contextualising present narrative, a narrative which is in no way comprehensive, but full of gaps and omissions and weighted by partisan understandings and desires. (Worthington, 1996, p.15)
The "historical narrative" in this context is what I have referred to as re-telling. Re-tellings are only fragments of life: they have been selected from re-membered material which has been retrieved from the memory. The re-telling is a narrative version, written or oral, of the re-membered. The selection itself is reinterpreted from the point of view from which it is retold. Retrospect and the time that has elapsed since events occurred influence the present point which interprets the re-membered into narrative. As time passes, a memory becomes more distorted through reinterpretations and is imbued with the knowledge of consequences and the influences of others. The information re-told is intended for an audience and the awareness of this may have some bearing on what is told. Omissions of information (for example embarrassing or incriminating material or what could be judged as immoral conduct) may cause censorship between the re-membered and the retold.

Through using personal accounts as a source of information for my stories, I encountered many instances where my source "modulated" the past. For example, the letter I received which provided the information on which I based _A Face Around the Edges_ contained many assumptions and retrospective judgements, such as:

Aunty I. thought he might be a homosexual. I'd never noticed that he was abnormal 'down there' [sexual organs] when I changed his nappy....He went off up the bush one day with a few blokes and when he came back he was all quiet and strange. I thought there was something funny going on...apparently he left a book which his mother gave to her sister to burn after he died. She said it was so shocking she couldn't even say what it was (I. J. Hainge, personal communication, August 20, 1998).

There were allusions to his alleged homosexual behaviour and the actual nature of his mental illness, but few facts. The letter was Mrs. Hainge's re-telling of events in context with information given by other family members, with what was discovered after the events occurred and with what she chose to tell from what she re-membered.

The use of more than one source for information regarding history-biography does not override the discrepancies between actual events and re-telling. Archival sources can
confirm some information such as dates and times however little information is available through such sources regarding people's lives. Re-tellings are the only source of anecdotes and experiences in most cases. To collect more than one person's re-telling of the same actual event, still subjects the material to the same theoretical considerations.

Bearing in mind the selective nature of memory, re-membering and re-telling, the historical-biographical narrative drawn from these sources is subject to the cognitive processes within them.

The narrative process adds a further point of view to the re-tellings: the narrator's own "gaps and omissions", "partisan understandings and desires" (Worthington, 1996, p.15). In this work which deals with the genealogical history of the author's family, the memory, re-membering and re-telling process also occurs within the cognitive processes of the author. The sources and the narrative process are selective, subjective, fallible and are not fixed.

The narrative styles I have chosen for the stories within this collection seek to imitate the cognitive processes of memory, re-membering and re-telling. The methods I have used to achieve this vary between stories. Some stories avoid a non-linear chronology, some use a "polyphonic" narrative, others attempt to exaggerate the omissions by using obvious fictional genres such as magical realism and the folk story. Foregrounding such genres subverts any "monological" view of the narrative.

The use of non-linear narratives is another device to interrogate traditional notions of historicity. This device is used in *The Reliquary*, where the "legends" and life of Antonio are re-told as scattered re-memberings within a present narrative point. The "legends" are re-tellings of Antonio's re-tellings and, in some cases, these stories are "legends" that were re-told to him. This obvious convolution brings an awareness of the
cognitive processes involved in re-telling personal history. The same images and events, such as the carving of the spoon, are cyclic and are intended to be confused between time and place.

Another method I have used to imitate the cognitive processes within historical-biographical narrative is to use multiple narrative voices, or what Bakhtin referred to as "polyphonic" narrative. He defined the characteristics of the polyphonic narrative in reference to the novel as:

plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses...the authors' consciousness does not turn others' consciousnesses (i.e. the consciousnesses of the heroes) into its objects and does not attach secondhand finalising definitions to them...[developing] each of the contending viewpoints to its maximum strength and depth, to the maximum of plausibility (Bakhtin cited in Allen, 1989, p.53).

More simply summarised by Jefferson and Robey as:

characterised by the multiplicity of voices present in it, none of which are subjected to the authoritarian control of the writer himself (1986, p.195).

The narrative style used in Holyoake, 1961 is polyphonic. The primary narrator tells the story in free indirect discourse within which occur the direct discourse of Margaret, the discourse from the "Daily News" newspaper and the adoption of third person narrative voice by the primary narrator. This creates a "multiplicity of voices" within the narrative. The first person, primary narrative voice is seemingly autobiographical, told in free indirect discourse and relating an interpretation of events. The re-tellings of other narrative voices within the narrative seek to recreate a version of the old world, however the primary narrator's interjections and shifts into third person disrupt the remembering of the past which has been destroyed by the fire. One such interjection is:

...Sticky tape melts so fast, probably before the flames even got to her room the posters would have loosened and drifted onto the lino...

The re-telling of Jean's story by the first person narrator, who assumes a third person voice, attributes part of the control which would usually be the author's to the narrator.
The polyphonic discourses within the story avert the cohesiveness of a single account. The re-membering of the past is a composite in this case, different versions of an actual event, highlighting the difference in what is re-membered by different sources.

The polyphonic narrative is used to different effect in *The Red Cat and the Postman*. The multiple narratives within this story work as binary oppositions, without hierarchy, to draw a strong distinction between two ideological standpoints. The rhetoric and cliché of both the voices is meant to bring the credibility of each into question. The distinctions between the two are sustained and, although a form of accord is reached, my intention is to show the polarisation of racist and tolerant ideologies in the social setting of the story.

Elements of magical realism are used within the stories to give a sense of filling the gaps in the re-telling without creating a false history. The character of Jean in *A Face Around the Edges* for example, is based on the real person's recollection of her seventeen-year-old self from a seventy-five-year-old's point of view. The time was represented as an elevated memory of her halcyon days of youth. My intention was to represent these memories of a "magical time" with a sense of the unreality they had accrued in fifty-eight years of re-membering.

The genre of short story draws its origins from the folk story or fairy tale and I used this relationship in *The Little Match Girl* (Shaw, 1983, p.20). My intention is to blur distinctions between folk tale and the re-telling of family history through merging what is retold with the folk tale of the same name by Hans Christian Andersen. Regarding the life of the real Elizabeth, only ambiguous fragments remain within the oral history of the family. My research uncovered a likelihood that she was a "child of the Empire": an orphan transported to the British colonies and set to work. This was suggested through references in E. Annie Proulx's novel *The Shipping News* and further reading led me to a study of *Children of the Empire* by Gillian Wagner. The link with the
orphans making matchboxes came from this research and the story of Elizabeth began to take on the qualities of a folk story. *The Little Match Girl* grew in the gaps or from the lack of information. These gaps led me to search for a voice without inventing memories. The oral history therefore began to merge with the folk tale.

3. Form and Context

Within my work, I have been exploring the genre of the short story. I have found it a very malleable form and well suited to biographical fictions that have a variety of themes and settings. The potential for the poetic within the genre has been exciting to work with. The brevity of the short story allows nuances of rhythm to be sustained and repetitions of images, words and phrases to be effective. Edgar Allen Poe said of the short story:

> Since, like a short poem, a prose tale could be read in one continuous effort...similar momentum and impact could be achieved by carefully judging the length and pace of narrative fiction (Shaw, 1983, p.9).

The material with which I am working is mainly anecdotes, which are self-contained and short allowing wholeness of ideas. The quick pace of the short story was essential to give *Holyoake, 1961* the speediness it needed to effectively portray the panic of evacuation and the quick destruction by fire. Similarly, *A Face Around the Edges* required a quick pace to allow the fragments of information to hold together. Given the sparsity of information, a longer narrative would have required excessive invention. Repetitions in *The Reliquary* are used as a poetic device alluding to the cyclical nature of life and the repetition of the same activities in a traditional society. They also give the story a poetic rhythm.

When the outcome of a story is already known by the author, prior to undertaking the writing process, the story has already attained completion as a concept. Katherine Mansfield said "once one has thought out a story nothing remains but the labour" (Shaw, 1983, p.3). This is especially true of work that is drawn from real past events.
The characters, the outcomes are already fixed. It is the decision of the author to find a form and a voice in which to tell the story most effectively and to choose the point of entry and departure from the course of events. It is also the author's function to work within the ambiguities of memory and history, to decide what to tell, what to hide and how to bridge the gaps in the information. It has been my intention to maintain a level of historical-biographical integrity within these stories, while also allowing myself to work with the gaps.

Part of my own process of finding form is to frame my stories with artificial structures. These are usually subtitles in my early drafts which are removed at a later stage of editing. Early drafts of these stories included subtitles of years (achronically), quotes from a poem and newspaper extracts. Newspaper article quotes were used in *A Face Around the Edges*, which I retained because of their effect which imitates the shock within the narrative. I find this structuring helps me to arrange the story with intention. Journalistic interjections and the concrete details of dates and times often contrast with the narrative style. These sharp shifts act as a reminder of the historical basis of the stories and the presence of real-world happenings.

The emblematic power of objects as symbolic of a larger picture is an influence drawn from my reading of Katherine Mansfield's short stories. She frequently uses plants, such as the aloe in *Prelude*, to give power and atmosphere to her stories and elicit some sort of contact with powers beyond the material world. Objects often personify their owners such as the Burberry coat in *An Indiscreet Journey*, in which she invests protective powers and a history and mythology of its own.

The influence of Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits* on my work is considerable. This novel is drawn from family history and oral tales and worked together into a narrative based on memories and the tradition of storytelling. Her use of magical
realism also endows the world of her forebears with a glorious unrealness which may
have grown through the distortions of re-telling.

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* has also influenced my writing through its unique
blending of the re-membered into the present narrative. The novel "willfully integrates
memories of the past into the continuing narratives of the present" (Worthington, 1996,
p.182). The novel is filled with re-tellings from a present narrative point and the
narrative style subtly blends the two time frames so that the re-membered material
adopts the tense of the present narrative and the narrator of the re-telling seems to
disappear or merge with the principal narrator.

4. The collection

The stories speak together. *Holyoake, 1961* and *The Red Cat and the Postman* speak
about the lives of young people in 1960s country Australia. *The Red Cat and the
Postman* and *The Reliquary* share a common discourse in the experiences of Italian
immigrants to Australia. *A Face Around the Edges* confronts the displacement of a
young man being treated for mental illness from his family and society. *Holyoake,
1961*, *The Reliquary* and *The Little Match Girl* also deal with issues of displacement,
from home, family and country. *The Movement of A Body Over Earth* is about freedom
and the need to escape from the limitations of home. The stories incorporate different
times and places: nineteenth century Italy, England and Chile, 1940s, 1960s and 1980s
Australia. They seek to imitate the nature of genealogical history in that every source
foregrounds a different story. Each re-teller has their own agenda for what they wish to
tell.

As a collection, these stories are a polyphonic narrative. They act in combination, as
multiple voices which re-member genealogical history, each of them taking a different
aspect or different branch of the historical-biographical story. The stories are a
collection of family relics, re-membered and re-told in narrative voice.
Reference List

(i) for Creative Writing Component


Reference List (2)

(ii) for Critical Component


