



Using multiple narrators to recover the lives of women from the past: A creative biography of Catherine Spence.

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Abstract

Using multiple narrators to recover the lives of women from the past: A creative biography of Catherine Spence.

Catherine Helen Spence (1825-1910) has been described as Australia's first feminist (Magarey 2010 [1985], 20) but the diverse achievements and contradictory recollections make Spence a difficult subject for traditional biography. Drawing on archival research and revisiting Spence's literary works, I have written her life using the techniques of fiction, including conversations recreated from her letters and novels, underscored by formal referencing, to reimagine the many and conflicted reactions to her pioneering endeavours. My account of Spence's life, while founded on documented evidence, is ultimately a work of speculation, making a substantial and original supplement to her afterlife by its interpretative methodology. By representing opposing points of view, 'I knew Miss Spence' reflects the challenge post-modern theory poses to singular interpretations of past lives in both the disciplines of history and biographical fiction. My technique contributes to the epistemology of life writing by providing a framework for innovative, creative biography, particularly where the protagonist has a significant literary legacy. As a practice-led research project, the creative biography 'I knew Miss Spence' is accompanied by an exegetical exploration of how multiple narrators can challenge the genre conventions of biography to portray a many-faceted past life by integrating archival investigation with imaginative interpretation. This reflection situates the creative work within an overarching framework of narratology and a field of life writing, demonstrating the application of the theoretical concepts of relational others (Eakin 2019) and heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981).¹

Bakhtin, Mikhail M., and Michael Holquist. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

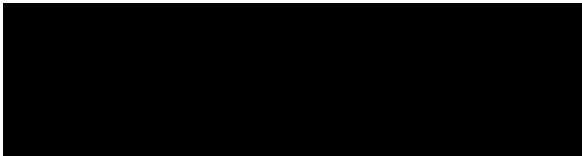
Eakin, Paul John 2019. *How our Lives become Stories*. Ithaca, New York USA: Cornell University Press.

Magarey, Susan. 2010 [1985]. *Unbridling the Tongues of Women*. 2 ed. Adelaide: Adelaide University Press.

NOTE: Sections of Chapters 3 and 5 have been included in an article under peer review for *Rethinking History* and sections of Chapter 5 in an article in publication for *TEXT Journal*.

Certification

I certify that the ideas, analyses, conclusions and creative work in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.



Elizabeth Chappell

8th March 2024

Candidate Name

Date

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“As this section includes creative material, it is subject to an embargo.”

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Part 2:

Exegesis: ‘Recovering Miss Spence’

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Introduction

Catherine Helen Spence (1825-1910) was recognised in her lifetime as ‘The Grand Old Woman of Australia’ and is described as ‘Australia’s first feminist’ (Magarey (2010 [1985], 20). However, the diversity of her achievements as an author, journalist, political reformer and philanthropist makes her a daunting subject for biographers. My creative work, ‘I knew Miss Spence’, challenges genre conventions of biography by creating multiple narrators to portray a complex and many-faceted life. Drawing on archival research and close reading of Spence’s literary works, I have written Spence’s life using the techniques of fiction, including conversations re-created from her letters and novels, underscored by formal referencing, to reimagine the many and conflicted reactions to her pioneering endeavours.

My research question – how can multiple narrators recover the lives of women from our past in creative biography? – focusses archival investigation and imaginative interpretation to re-present the many facets of Spence’s character. The bifurcated structure of a practice-led PhD encourages both the creation of the biographic work and a reflection on my authorial process. This accompanying exegesis situates ‘I knew Miss Spence’ within an overarching framework of narratology and a field of life writing exemplified by comparable speculative biographies – an overarching definition of a form of biographical writing where speculation and imaginative incursions may be signalled or implicit (Brien and Lindsey 2022, 3). It acknowledges post-modern theory by subverting the established convention of an objective narrator for biography, drawing instead on the voices of those closest to her, her ‘relational others’ (Eakin 2019), thus providing an original contribution through a methodology for recovering life stories from multiple perspectives. The introductory chapters summarise Catherine Spence’s complex life and previous scholarly investigations of her. Chapter 3, a literature review, synthesises theoretical approaches to life writing from the disciplines of history, biography and fiction. Chapters 4 and 5 develop a scope and methodology for my writing of Spence’s life, followed by concluding chapters on the outcome of my creative work, its significance and contribution to the field of life writing.

1. Project Overview

Catherine Helen Spence's public achievements as an author, journalist, political reformer and philanthropist are well documented. Her biographer, Susan Magarey, asserts the difficulty in understanding 'the making of the woman capable of doing so much' (2010 [1985], 9). By close reading, sometimes against the grain, of Spence's personal letters, memoirs of a family member and a political colleague, and by using Spence's own novels and newspaper articles as cultural references, I am re-imagining her complex character through the voices of those closest to her, to explore her motivations, emotions and conflicts. I adopt a style evocative of (imagined) oral history interviews to recover their voices from the time when the memoirs were written, twenty-seven years after Spence's death, to reflect how Spence was remembered by those closest to her and to supplement the archival repository with emotional resonance.

I have chosen the terminology 'creative biography', coined by Caryl Phillips for his hybrid biographical works (Birat 2018, 59), and similarly applied to works of creative non-fiction (Gutkind 1997). This term aligns with the emerging practice of 'creative history' which informs my method, whereby experiments with form, recognising the writing of history as an inherently creative practice by engaging diverse literary techniques, are extending and amplifying 'historical imagination' and exploring the interaction between research and creativity (Lindsey et al. 2022b, 8). I employ the devices of fiction – characterisation, dialogue, imagery, setting – to delve for meaning beneath the documents. While this practice is consistent with Michael Lackey's definition of biofiction, or the biographical novel, as 'literature that names its protagonist after an actual biographical figure' (2016a, 3), I have opted for the description of creative biography to situate my work on a 'truth value' spectrum or continuum (Novak, 2017a, 6; Keener 2001, 1). By doing so I eliminate the term 'fiction', which, as with the genres of creative non-fiction and creative history, foregrounds my work's referential veracity.

Definition of narratives at the confluence of biography and fiction remains fluid as authors endeavour to differentiate works according to their degree of speculation or imagination. The terms biofiction, biographical novel or fictionalised biography are frequently used interchangeably and are generally taken to privilege literary style over referential content, as in Lackey's definition above. However, some scholars, such as Parini (2016, 21), Tunca and Ledent (2020, 339) and Schabert (1990, 4), use the term

biofiction or fictionalised biography to indicate a practice or method rather than genre. My method in 'I knew Miss Spence' combines literary style with referential protocols in a manner similar to historian Mark McKenna's description of his 'creative biography' of Manning Clark (2024, podcast).

As a practice-led research project, my creative biography demonstrates the theoretical concepts of relational others and multiple voices (heteroglossia) in biography and biographical fiction. Reflecting Spence's character through her 'relational others' as narrators of her story explores layers of interpretation within her extant documents thus amplifying both her public and private afterlives within the context of nineteenth-century Adelaide. Julia Novak employed the term 'afterlives' to describe how notable women from history can be re-presented in biographical novels to extend their recognition in 'a society's cultural memory' (2016, 84). Catherine Spence's life is worthy of such exploration. My approach draws on the definitive work of Paul John Eakin (2019) on the significance of relational others in auto/biography and Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) theory of heteroglossia, by close reading of Spence's archival trail in search of multiple interpretations.

My objective is neither to eulogise nor to judge Spence, but to reimagine her character by amplifying the social forces at play and anchoring the narrative in its zeitgeist. This was a time when the British Empire was revered by its subjects and Christian religions motivated many social practices that are regarded as abhorrent in the twenty-first century (Gibbs 1969, 122-123; Reynolds 2012, 24-26). In my creative biography of Spence, I have endeavoured to present her life in the context of her times, while remaining aware that social values and perceptions have changed and both I, as the author, and readers of this work will bring personal perspectives to it. Presenting a past life within its prevailing values, cultural and socio-political structures can enhance our capacity to understand that world (Sardica 2013, 394). Margaret Atwood commented that life stories can be interpreted differently over time: 'Works of literature are recreated by each generation of readers, who make them new by finding fresh meanings in them' (2002, 50). Daniel Lehman's theory of 'reading over the edge' explains how both authors and readers engage with a text according to their prior experiences and knowledge of the subject (1997, 2). My account of Spence's life, while founded on documented evidence, is ultimately a work of imagination reflecting my own experience of second-wave feminism of the 1970s.

I extrapolate on archival evidence with contextual and personal details, by using the techniques of fiction writing. Helen Thomson (1987) and others have analysed Spence's literary legacy; Magarey in *Unbridling the Tongues of Women* (2010 [1985]) has documented Spence's biographic details and recorded her political and philanthropic endeavours. However, my creative biography within the discipline of Writing draws on the epistemologies of narratology and historiography. It casts new light on both interpretation of Spence's complex character and the approach to writing women's lives from several points of view to reflect conflicting role expectations within their public and private spheres.

2. Recovering Miss Spence

Spence is best remembered within her home state of South Australia with a life-sized statue in central Adelaide, a portrait prominently displayed in the Spence wing of the State Library of South Australia and a scholarship awarded every four years for a woman to study social science. Towards the end of her life, Spence was known as ‘the Grand Old Woman of Australia’, rising again from obscurity briefly at the centenary of white colonisation of South Australia in 1936, when her political protégée, Jeanne Young, published a hagiographical tribute (1937). Spence appeared on the Australian \$5 banknote to commemorate the centenary of Federation acknowledged as a ‘journalist, social and political reformer, novelist and feminist’ (“Catherine Helen Spence, 1825–1910”). In the twenty-first century Spence is most often remembered for her political work, but she has also drawn critical attention for her lack of recognition of First Nations Australians and her work in moving children from State orphanages into private home care (Barbalet 1983; Hancock 2003; Michell 2016).

Just as Spence attracts censure in the twenty-first century for her views on class and race, so in her lifetime she was criticised, both publicly and privately, for disrupting accepted gender roles (*Mail*, Adelaide 24 July 1943, 11; Spence 1910, 81). Her early writing, as South Australian correspondent for the *Melbourne Argus*, was published under her brother’s name (Spence 1910, 24). Her niece, Lucy Morice, explains how her mother didn’t attend ‘Auntie Kate’s’ lectures because she didn’t approve of women speaking in public (*Mail*, Adelaide 24 July 1943, 11). Her sister Mary was upset when she was mistaken for ‘the Miss Spence who writes for the newspapers’ (Spence 1910, 22). The first three of Spence’s novels were published anonymously and had she succeeded in being elected as a delegate to the Federal Convention in 1897, the South Australian premier Charles Kingston had publicly announced that she would not be able to take up her position (Spence 1910, 81). Spence’s resurrection by second-wave feminists amplified her campaign for female equality, recognising her call for increased education and employment opportunities for women.

In my creative biography of Spence, I have looked to her ‘relational others’ – people close to the subject who anchor a life story in its context as explicated in Chapter 3 iii, pages 223–225 – to tell her story retrospectively from several perspectives, rather than foregrounding her public life, to situate her story in the zeitgeist of colonial South

Australia. Spence's career followed four distinct but overlapping paths. This was recognised during her lifetime. At the celebration of her eightieth birthday, Jeanne Young arranged for four prominent Adelaide men to speak respectively on Spence's novels, journalism, philanthropic work and political activities (*Register*, 31 October 1905, 5). Helen Jones suggested this diversity and breadth of achievement was the reason no definitive biography had been produced of Spence. 'Catherine Helen Spence is a daunting subject for any biographer because of her long life and the extraordinarily wide range of her activities,' Jones said in 1983 (48). Following two biographies and one novel on Spence, my work makes a substantial and original contribution to her afterlife by its interpretative methodology.

Spence's diaries, one for each year for almost sixty years, disappeared after Young's tribute was published in 1937. Investigations by Magarey et al. (2005, 214) and Jones (1988, 167) concluded that the diaries had been destroyed, except one, for 1894, now held by the State Library of South Australia. The diaries' disappearance underscores friction over Spence's legacy and limits later interpretations of her life. I faced the questions: Would Spence be remembered differently if her autobiography had been completed by Lucy Morice instead of Jeanne Young? Would her biographers and critics have formed other conclusions if her diaries had still been available?

Magarey published a biography of Spence in 1985. Later she acknowledged that she had drawn chiefly on Spence's autobiography and concentrated on her public life:

Had I given greater attention to the interplay between Catherine Spence's private and her public lives, I would have ... portrayed Catherine Spence a little differently. In my thesis I depicted the source of Catherine Spence's exceptional energy and achievements in her public life as ambition and I described her friendships as 'predominantly instrumental' ... a consequence of focussing on her achievement of a public life, and neglecting the life she lived in private [her friendships] are warm, vulnerable, grateful, humorous, considerate and above all, immensely generous. So too are the relationships with her mother ... with her immediate family ... and with her little community of 'quasi-kin'. If these relationships form the core that shaped the public person that Catherine Spence became and guided her

public life, then the source of her energy and commitment could not be described exclusively as ambition (2009, 212).

Magarey drew on additional correspondence between Spence and her female friends, Rose Scott and Alice Henry, for this later investigation. Unlike Young in 1937, she did not have access to Spence's diaries. I have worked from the same sources as Magarey, reading through a creative rather than historical lens.

i. Spence's literary legacy

An excellent contribution to the social history of colonial life

Melbourne Review, January 1879, 110.

Spence's literary legacy is at the core of this project. The strong female characters in Spence's fiction caught the attention of second-wave feminists of the 1970s and 1980s, when four of her novels were reprinted. Two novels, *Handfasted* (1984) and *Gathered In* (1977 [1881]), and her novella *A Week in the Future* (1987 [1889]) were published in book form for the first time. Her best-known novel, *Clara Morison* (1971 [1854]), has been included in Australian literature studies and cited as an evocative and important portrait of early colonial life in South Australia (Magarey in Spence 1971[1854], 'Introduction', xi; Hall 2007, 33). I looked to Spence's novels for contextual descriptions of early Adelaide as well as examples of the conversational idiom of the era.

Miles Franklin generously compared Spence to Jane Austen (Magarey 2010 [1985], 49). Describing *Clara Morison*, she wrote 'The novel is unexcelled as a picture of the times – better than history as the work of a certain sort of portraitist is superior to that of a photographer' (Franklin, 1937 175). Spence herself did the same, claiming that her novels showed a broader societal base than Austen's (1910, 26). Spence professed that her novels reflected her personal experience (Spence to Smith Elder, 1 August 1853).

The characters in *Clara Morison* depict middle-class expectations and women's struggle for financial independence. As a domestic novel, *Clara Morison* evokes a broader colonial context disrupting the entrenched British class system (Magarey in Spence 1971[1854], 'Introduction', xv; Hall 2007, 33). Rosalind Smith observes that Spence uses the colonial space 'to contest and redefine the social value of feminine domestic industry in both the private sphere of marriage and the public sphere of colonial prosperity' (2001, 41). Spence's fiction, showing eponymous Clara Morison as a

domestic servant or Elsie and Jane working in the laundry in *Mr Hogarth's Will*, promotes respect for manual work and indicates that it does not diminish social standing (Walker 2004, 772). At the same time, the heroines later find more rewarding employment, which illustrates the greater opportunities available to women through emigration. The protagonists in *Clara Morison*, *Gathered In*, *Mr Hogarth's Will* and *The Author's Daughter* all surmount financial and social obstacles to find happiness and prosperity by migrating from Britain to Australia. Fariha Shaikh (2018) compares Spence's works with those of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, classifying them as 'immigration literature' with their use of intertextual devices such as imagined letters and conversations about literature bringing British and colonial life closer together (2018, 162).

By the time she wrote *Clara Morison*, Spence had lived in Adelaide for fifteen years, refused two marriage proposals and saw herself as 'booked for a single life' (Spence 1910, 19). She was anxious to refute the impression in England that every female emigrant would make a prosperous marriage:

Another reason I had for writing the book. Thackeray had written about an emigrant vessel taking a lot of women to Australia, as if these were all to be gentlemen's wives, as if there was such a scarcity of educated women there that anything wearing petticoats had the prospect of a great rise in position (22).

Spence recognises women as a domestic and cultural anchor in the new colony. While she emphasises women as equal partners in developing farmland and small business, she wants to raise awareness that not all will marry. In *Clara Morison* she offers practical guidance to the wider cultural opportunities for young single women in contrast to the prevailing expectation that every woman would find a ready husband (Sharp 2019, par. 5). The real-life experiences of Ellen Gregory, Spence's companion/housekeeper, epitomise that myth.

In her third novel, *Mr Hogarth's Will*, Spence addresses the limited avenues of suitable employment for women. She wrote: 'I took up the woman question as it appeared to me at the time – the difficulty of a woman earning a livelihood, even when she has as much ability, industry and perseverance as a man' (Spence 1988 [1865]; Spence 1910, 25). In *Mr Hogarth's Will*, Elsie and Jane are given a typically male

education and disinherited by their uncle so they will become strong and independent rather than attract marriage offers from fortune-hunters. Their employment in England is limited to governess or dressmaker. In these ‘between stairs’ positions ‘one is worried by the children, snubbed by the parents, sneered at by servants and ignored by visitors,’ says the protagonist, highlighting the ambiguous position of ‘genteel’ women forced to seek employment in other households (Spence 1988 [1865], 12).

However, Spence practices her own form of snobbery – of a literary and intellectual nature. In *Gathered In*, Mrs Oswald’s drawing room is ‘crowded with useless and incongruous furniture, tasteless nick-nacks and the wildest of fancy work,’ but she ‘finds no time for reading, except the magazines’ and her son ‘has no taste for books at all’ (Spence 1977 [1881], 52, 54-55). Spence’s novels are crammed with references to the literature of her day – the novels of Dickens, Thackeray, Scott and George Eliot, poetry of Tennyson and Byron – and conversations about literature are used to create romantic bonds. ‘Clara’s knowledge of British literature is her glass slipper in this Cinderella story,’ writes Sarah Sharp (2019, par. 22). Spence uses literary references to advance the novel’s feminist considerations about work and marriage (Magarey 1995, 39).

Spence has not enjoyed the longevity of the other Victorian-era authors she admired. Magarey posits this is not a reflection on her literary skills but the Australian masculine ideal from which her novels were judged (2010 [1985], 49). She observes that from insights of the women’s movement of the mid to late twentieth century, we can read in Spence’s novels a strong commitment to changing defined roles between the sexes (2010 [1985], 49).

Catherine Spence was exceedingly forthright for her times, questioning accepted social ideas about women. Her discussions on prostitution (1907, 62) and domestic violence (*South Australian Register*, 15 July 1878, 5), demonstrate that she was not naïve to the ways of the world, despite her self-proclaimed celibate life (*South Australian Register*, 1 November 1878, 6; *South Australian Register*, 9 November 1878, 5). Her description of liaisons between settler men and Indigenous women in a fictional central American colony, from her novel *Handfasted*, implicitly highlights her recognition of relations between white men and Aboriginal women on the Australian frontier:

There were far more men than women in our first settlement and there was a tribe of Indians here that we had whiles to fight and whiles to make treaty with, and some of our men took Indian wives or rather no wives, but what the *Spectator* would be called mistresses ... and they would not marry the women out of hand as they were not Christians, so the Council settled that they should live together for a year and a day which would give time for their conversion ... and then if both the parties wished it, the heathen women should be baptised and married (Spence 1984, 42).

Spence's concern appears to be with the conversion to Christianity of the 'heathen' native women, a concern mirrored by the European missionary movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, rather than social inequalities. She took the notion of 'handfasting' or trial marriage from an old Scottish lowland custom, described by Sir Walter Scott in *The Monastery* (Thomson 1988, 107). Considered socially disruptive in the nineteenth century, premarital and intercultural relationships are normative in twenty first century Australia.

Handfasted was not published in her lifetime. Spence submitted it to a *Sydney Mail* literary competition where it was rejected as 'calculated to loosen the marriage tie – it was too socialistic and consequently dangerous' (Spence 1910, 63). Nan Albinski points out that Spence's imagined colony 'is a remarkably tolerant community, where a woman may cohabit serially with a number of men and may bear children to each without shame or poverty' (1989, 21). This radical suggestion in the nineteenth century was seized upon by second-wave feminists as an exemplar of freeing women from traditional sexual and social constraints. When *Handfasted* was published in 1984, its editor, Helen Thomson, explained that from a conservative perspective, *Handfasted* was seen to raise potentially subversive ideas (Spence 1984, viii). I suggest its sanctioning of miscegenation may have also been unacceptable to the 1879 competition judges.

Spence contributed regularly to the *South Australian Register* for fifteen years, choosing the pseudonym 'A Colonist of 1839' for her feature articles, a clear proclamation of her admiration for the colonial project and her association with it. As a journalist, Spence was able to articulate her views explicitly. She used her access to the press to promote her most important causes: welfare of State children and elections by proportional voting. Her best remembered work from her extremely prolific first year at

the *Register* was a three-part series on ‘Some Social Aspects of South Australian Life’ (*South Australian Register*, 26 October 1878, 5; 1 November 1878, 6; 9 November 1878, 5) lauded in the *Melbourne Review* as ‘an excellent contribution to the social history of colonial life’ (January 1879, 110). Although expressing sentiments of British superiority unacceptable to present-day readers, it provides a rich cultural reference to its times.

Spence certainly took full advantage of the ‘latitude’ extended by the *Register* in choosing her subject matter. Her forthright opinions caused consternation in her conservative community, which I explore and amplify in the creative work. Many of her feature articles show a deliberate activism for female causes, especially concerning education and employment, but she maintained that she ‘dealt with the larger questions which were common to humanity’ (Spence 1910, 56). She was extraordinarily well read, demonstrated by the literary references in her articles and novels. Her feature articles in the *Register* display sharp social observation coupled with humour and cite many of her favourite British authors, especially George Eliot. Like her novels, Spence’s journalism provides a cultural reference to her era. ‘When I recall the causes which I furthered, and which in some instances I started, I feel inclined to magnify the office of the anonymous contributor to the daily press,’ she said (1910, 56). Spence was aware of the potential influence of her writing and used it to promote those causes most important to her.

ii. Politics

A vote that might leave me a disenfranchised voter instead of an unenfranchised woman
Catherine Helen Spence, 1910, 77 (in support of proportional representation).

Spence was a late recruit to women’s suffrage, believing electoral reform to be more important. She was not initially a member of the Women’s Suffrage League, founded in Adelaide by Mary Lee in 1888 (Jones 1986, 86). Nor did she initially discuss women’s suffrage in her newspaper articles. She wrote:

I considered electoral reform on the Hare system of more value than the enfranchisement of women and was not eager for the doubling of the electors in number, especially as the new voters would probably be more ignorant and more apathetic than the old. I was accounted a weak-kneed sister by those who worked primarily for women suffrage ... it was not until the movement for the enfranchisement of women grew too strong to

be neglected that I took hold of it at all; and I do not claim any credit for its success in South Australia and the Commonwealth, further than this – that by my writings and my spoken addresses I showed that one woman had a steady grasp on politics and on sociology (Spence 1910, 41).

Spence was shrewd enough to recognise the growing support for women's enfranchisement both in Australia and overseas. She joined the Women's Suffrage League in 1891 and was immediately elected vice-president (Jones 1986, 96).

South Australia became the first Australian state to enfranchise all women, including First Nations women, in 1894 (Brett 2019, 38). New Zealand women gained the vote just months earlier – unlike other Australian states, South Australia and New Zealand were settled under the Wakefield Scheme, without convicts. Spence was approached by the United Trades and Labour Council in 1896 to stand for the South Australian parliament. She declined. Spence did not want to be committed to any political party or faction (Jones 1986, 135). She did, however, produce a series of lectures and newspaper articles advising women how to exercise their vote. Proportional representation played an important part in her advice. Spence and her niece, Lucy Morice, founded the Women's League in 1895 to educate women how to vote wisely (Jones 1986, 126-127; *South Australian Register*, 9 May 1896, 3).

Spence's nomination for the 1897 Federal Convention (a body established to draft Australia's Constitution) won her a place in history if not a seat at the Convention. She is still regularly mentioned as the first Australian woman to stand for political office. Brett (2019, 31) asserts that by her nomination and campaign for proportional representation, Spence 'put electoral methods on the agenda for the new Commonwealth'. Clare Wright cites Spence at the Federal Convention as 'speeding along with that familiar little trot, her hair snow white now, but her voice full of cheerfulness' (2019, 70). Spence's great friend, NSW women's suffragist Rose Scott, consistently pointed out that Spence was the pioneer voice for Australian women's aspirations (Magarey 2010 [1985], 20; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 1910, 5).

Spence frequently quoted the social philosophers of her time – John Stuart Mill, Sidney Webb and Thomas Malthus – in her newspaper articles. She echoed their critique of the inequalities of class and gender in British and colonial societies but also reflected their blindness to racial inequality. Knowing and revisiting the material Spence would

have read offers a pathway to understanding the society in which she lived and campaigned. In 'I knew Miss Spence', I have quoted from her articles on Adelaide society to portray her interactions and conversations.

iii. Spinsterhood

A great many women have a vocation for celibacy

Catherine Helen Spence, *South Australian Register*, 9 November 1878, 5.

The term 'spinster', meaning a single woman of marriageable age, was commonly used in Spence's time. It appeared on legal documents – marriage certificates, wills, property deeds – in England until 2005 (*Guardian*, 8 December 2005). Spence was aware of the negative connotations of unmarried women as objects of pity, overlooked in marriage proposals and often impoverished. In her tribute to Spence, Young claims that 'in her twenties she had not yet become reconciled to being passed over' but by thirty 'she was expected to don the badge of spinsterhood – a cap' (1937, 46, 48).

Spence emphasises her spinsterhood as a position of choice, an assertion of independence, in part influenced by her upbringing in the Calvinist tradition. She bluntly uses the term 'celibate' to describe single life (*South Australian Register*, 9 November 1878, 5). She suggests that 'the removal of all artificial restrictions on women's work will make it more honourable to be single, and therefore will remove the strongest temptation to a loveless marriage' (*South Australian Register*, 9 November 1878, 5). I have interpreted Spence's declaration of celibacy as a statement of independence, allowing her to follow her literary pursuits and head her own household. Spence clearly articulates, through her novels and newspaper articles, the value she places on individual freedom and the sacrifice of personal agency involved in marriage.

Spence makes no reference to female sexual desire, depicting girls as victims of seduction rather than willing partners: 'The harshness of women sheltered from temptation to their sisters who had yielded to it is most unChristlike and inhuman. These girls had been weak, easily led, probably deceived by false promises' (Spence 1907, 62; *Adelaide Advertiser*, 11 May 1907, 9). This accords with the findings of Susan Sheridan (1995, 59), that acknowledgement of female sexual desire posed not only a threat to nineteenth-century women's respectability but also their independence. Sheridan posits that romance novels of the period express 'the view that passionate love is incompatible with a woman's autonomy' (59). Spence is likely to have subscribed to this opinion,

given her frequent critiques of women's subservience in marriage and her own asserted independence, together with her strong religious convictions.

Single women in the nineteenth century were often financially dependent on a male relative, pitied for having 'failed' to attract a husband and socially ostracised. One in three adult women in Britain were unmarried according to the 1851 census (Jeffreys 1997, 86). Notions of respectability inhibited them from leaving home or finding meaningful employment, explains Sheila Jeffreys: 'The campaign for women's employment and education stemmed largely from such concern' (1997, 87). Spence articulates the ambiguous social position of unmarried women in her fiction. In *Clara Morison*, Margaret Elliot tells Clara that only some women have a vocation for marriage and 'old maids are laughed at here [Australia] as elsewhere' (1971 [1854], 214). Similarly, in *Mr Hogarth's Will*: 'we'll never get a husband for Miss Melville, for the gentlemen are all frightened of her' (Spence 1988 [1865], 370). Jeffreys points out that single women speaking out to better the lives of women were viewed as a threat by other women as well as men:

The development of a class of spinsters proud to proclaim that they were happy, fulfilled, had made a deliberate choice and were vital to the political struggle of women met with serious opposition. It was not just men who wanted to deride and undermine the position of these women. Some feminists also went into the attack (1997, 93).

Jeffreys was writing about Britain, but her description matches Spence's self-portrait (1910, 19). Magarey explains that women's suffrage organisations of the time, while advocating female independence, took care to disassociate themselves from the 'indecent spectre of "free love" and "concubinage"' (2001, 24). Second-wave feminism of the 1970s coincided with the availability of the contraceptive pill, giving women control over their fertility and consequent sexual freedom. However, conservative elements of society were disturbed by these 'radical' feminists and their demand for sexual equality, labelling them as 'Brazen Hussies' (Dwyer, 2020). Spence envisions efficient contraception in her Utopian novel *A Week in the Future* (1987 [1889] 39) but does not imagine the sexual freedom and social change this will herald.

Rose Scott also appears to have remained single by choice. She, like Spence, was the daughter who stayed home to care for her aged mother and, like Spence, became

carer for her nephew after the death of her sister (J A Allen 1994, 66-67, 73-74). Scott's biographer, Judith Allen (1994), outlines attitudes towards spinsterhood in Spence and Scott's time:

Mid-nineteenth century English debate about the so-called 'surplus women' problem was usually cast in economic or industrial terms. How were women in a poor marriage market, in which they outnumbered available husbands, to get their livings? However, it is clear from many sources, especially from diaries, letters and women's fiction, that spinsters endured many damaging cultural messages in social relations built around heterosexual norms (1994, 78).

Middle-class spinsterhood, while pitied, was less stigmatised in the nineteenth century than it became by the mid-twentieth when a choice of single life was seen as neurotic. Allen attributes this shift to the 'sexualisation' of everyday life in twentieth century historicism (1994, 78). Spence anticipated the freedom that meaningful employment and effective contraception would afford women a century later in her utopian novel, *A Week in the Future* (Spence 1987 [1889], 38-39). Spence and Scott enjoyed a friendship underpinned by common interests in promoting the rights, education and general position of women, supported by their similar life experiences and sustained by correspondence over a number of years (Spence to Scott 1893-1910). Scott deferred to Spence, her senior by 22 years, as the 'ideal pioneer' for women's rights (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 1910, 5).

In her autobiography, Spence extolls the value of close friends. She attributes the intellectual satisfaction of her later years to 'my association with a band of cultured and earnest women interested in social, political and other public questions' (Spence 1910, 96). Some of these women, like Emily Clark and Emily Williams, were contemporaries and fellow Unitarians. Spence was thirty when she decided to leave the repressive Calvinistic church, lifting 'the dark veil of religious despondency' (Spence 1910, 19) for the free-thinking Unitarians, considered an 'intellectual elite' (Barbalet 1983, 191). Here she found a model in Martha Turner for taking a more prominent role in church life (Spence 1910, 52). She read *Vindication of the Rights of Women* by fellow Unitarian Mary Wollstonecraft (1988 [1792]); Spence 1910, 41). It was not until her late sixties that Spence found a cohort of younger like-minded independent women friends like

suffragists Rose Scott and Vida Goldstein, political colleague Jeanne Young, novelist Catherine Martin and journalist Alice Henry. Spence's letters to Scott and Henry enhanced my understanding of Spence's female friendships.

Spence was fifty-two when she ventured into public life as a journalist and preacher in the Unitarian church. She was sixty-five when she began her regular speaking engagements for proportional representation. At this stage of her life, she would most likely have encountered deference to her age rather than some of the barriers to younger women entering public life. Wright describes how Vida Goldstein 'collected marriage proposals like others collected the daily mail' (2019, 35) and Muriel Matters, 'with her halo of blonde hair and pretty features, knew she stood out from the crowd' (60). Spence, by contrast, was grey haired, stout and plainly dressed. Magarey et al. point out that Spence was shrewdly aware of the juxtaposition between her homely appearance and the stereotypical women's suffrage campaigner (2005, 12).

iv. Re-viving Spence

Women whose voices reach out across time to other women, whose lives speak to us today

Julia Novak 2017b, 223.

Spence remains relevant because so many of the issues she canvassed in her novels and newspaper articles, such as destigmatising illegitimacy, accepting trial marriages and no-fault divorce, only gained public recognition or legislative authority decades after her death. Other of her campaigns, such as preventing domestic violence or promoting equal employment for women, remain issues for our time. When Spence became the first woman to address the South Australian Institute in 1871, she reflected on her motivation: 'to make it easier henceforward for any woman who felt she had something to say to come forward and say it' (*South Australian Register*, 4 November 1871, 4; Spence 1910, 45). Julia Gillard, Australia's first female Prime Minister, in her 2013 resignation speech similarly said: 'What I am absolutely confident of is that it will be easier for the next woman and the woman after that and the woman after that' (Gillard 2013).

Spence declined an invitation to stand as a Labor candidate for the 1896 South Australian election, unwilling to forego her political independence (Jones 1986, 135). Her aversion to party allegiance, shared by her suffragist colleagues such as Vida

Goldstein, was echoed in the 2022 Australian Federal election of eight women independent of party affiliation (the ‘teal independents’). One of those women, Zoe Daniel, evoked the legacy of first-wave feminists in her acceptance speech (2022). Prominent Australian journalist Julia Baird reflected that this election result highlighted a perennial anxiety about women in power (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 2022, 32). These contemporary events illustrate the ability of women’s voices to speak to us across time (Magarey 2010 [1985], 9; Novak 2017b, 223) which gives Spence’s story significance in the twenty-first century.

3. Literature Review

i. The confluence of history, biography and fiction

Biographical fiction ... opens up our imaginations to a particular era

Jay Parini 2014, 206.

A significant body of scholarship across the genres of history, biography and fiction, with particular focus on multi-perspectival texts, underpins this project. Authors and scholars of those cross-genre works that are described within the academy as biofiction emphasise their adherence to documented evidence, coupled with its interpretative practice. The relationship between biography and fiction has been explored in the work of Kelly Gardiner and Catherine Padmore (2022) and Daria Tunca and Benedicte Ledent (2020), as well as Michael Lackey (2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b), Ina Schabert (1982, 1990), Julia Novak (2016, 2017a, 2017b) and others, which generally concludes that biofiction defies prescriptive categorisation.

Writers, whether working in the milieu of history or fiction, cannot avoid interpreting events – or evaluating already mediated events – through language. The inherent bias of written records was foregrounded in the mid-twentieth century. Hayden White challenged the history academy, emphasising that ‘there is no such thing as a *single* correct view of any object ... but there are *many* correct views, each requiring its own style and representation’ (1966, 130). In later work, White elaborated that because language contains interpretations and because records of past events use selectivity, emplotment and argument in presenting a written version of the past, historians and novelists employ similar strategies in processing their findings. ‘The facts do not speak for themselves, but the historian speaks for them, speaks on their behalf, and fashions the fragments of the past into a whole whose integrity is – in its representation – a purely discursive one,’ he said (2016 [1976], 249). White maintained that historians and novelists use similar narrative styles, but differ in their content: whether they are representing real or imagined events and characters (2016 [1976], 245). Biographical novels confound this suggestion.

Historians, together with scholars and practitioners of biographical fiction, dispute White’s definition. Tom Griffiths, for instance, illustrates that difference rests in the manner of telling rather than the content of a narrative (2015, 16). Donna Lee Brien and

Kiera Lindsey maintain that the practices of historical enquiry and fiction writing can offer complementary ways of understanding people from the past, explaining that the key distinction is their degree of speculation, acknowledged or implied, in a narrative based on rigorous research and informed imagination (2022, 4). Tracy Chevalier observes that ‘what trips up historians is having to always use that speculative language – “they might have thought this” whereas a novelist can just say – “she felt like this, she did that”’ (interviewed by Stocker 2018, 281). Matthew Ricketson points out that writers of historical or biographical fiction can include both fictional and actual characters to amplify their narratives, whereas fictional characters cannot exist in the real world of non-fiction (2010, 6). The ability to represent the inner life of a subject is generally recognised as the province of fiction (Slotkin 2005, par. 12; Parini 2019, par. 10; Lackey 2014, 3), thus leading the reader to question the veracity of narratives written in a literary style with emotional introspection and several points of view.

Narrating history from alternate points of view was pioneered by socialist historians like Edward Thompson and his contemporaries (Thompson 1965). Telling ‘history from below’ as described by Thompson found even stronger voice in the black rights movement and ‘second-wave’ feminism of the 1970s (Diamant 2014, 112). ‘People reclaimed their own stories, once considered trivial, as important and valid as the stories of white men,’ Anita Diamant writes (112). Writing lives from the margins of society, often from non-traditional sources and against the grain, prompted evaluation within the academy of how history is written and further blurred the boundaries between history and fiction.

Examining social structures and institutions from our past from new and different perspectives contests the traditional narrative technique of totalising – drawing a neat conclusion from archival documents – laying the foundation for post-modernism. Linda Hutcheon defines post-modernism:

It suggests no search for transcendent, timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and dialogue with the past in the light of the present ... It does not deny the *existence* of the past; it does question whether we can ever *know* that past other than through its textualized remains (1988, 19-20).

She explains that by moving from a language of dominance to one of de-centring – representing multiple perspectives – post-modern writing has disrupted the idea of a master narrative of the past (1988, 6). She observes that historiography and fiction are complementary activities, both reshaping our view of the past through narrative tropes. Hutcheon maintains that contradictory evidence is an inevitable condition of cultural and social experience, underscoring the post-modern departure from totalising narrative closure (1988, 227) and extending the scope of life writing.

Life writing is an emerging and broad-ranging collection of genres with a history of experimentation (Novak 2017a, 4) which, while referring to actual lives, includes biographical and autobiographical fiction (Novak and Ní Dhúill 2022, par.12). Novak cautions against applying the label post-modern to life writing modes that oppose the conventions of traditional biography or memoir, citing examples such as Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* (1990 [1933]) which pre-date post-modern theory (4). Similarly, Molly Hite points out that while twentieth century experimental fiction by women writers follows the decentring strategy of post-modernism, it achieves this by different methods. Hite attests that by emphasising characters and themes that are frequently confined to the margins of literature, writers such as Jean Rhys, Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood 'recentre the value structure of the narrative' to foreground female agency (1989, 2).

Contemporary historical novels can display aspects of post-modernism without engaging in a political or philosophical stance to reimagine a time past, indicates Leigh Wilson (2017, 145). She points out that post-modernist novels of the 1980s blur the border and 'challenge assumptions about the relation between the fictional and the real in a way that privileges the fictional' (146). Wilson questioned Barthes' 'reality effect' – the significant inclusion of 'useless' details in a text to signify rather than denote the real – in her analysis of Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (a multi-perspectival retelling of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*) and other contemporary novels. She concluded that:

[They] aim to reproduce a sense of the period of their setting ... to establish a new kind of reality effect. Here the real is established not through the 'useless detail'... but through the fixing of the limits of the narrative in the interior world and perceptual processes of the protagonists ... *The Hours*, although in the third-person, uses free indirect discourse to

suggest unmediated access to the thoughts of the characters (Wilson 2017, 154).

In the contested terrain of the biographical novel, demarcation between biography and fiction becomes blurred, but access to characters' thoughts and emotions and separation of author and narrator are generally considered indicators of fiction (Cohn 1990, 785, 792).

Literary scholars disagree over the credibility of biographical novels, or indeed the degree of imagination that classifies a text as a novel. Lackey asserts that biographical novels should be regarded as fiction and should not be judged by the same criteria as biographies (2016a, 4). However, he concedes that 'post-modernism underscores the degree to which fiction necessarily plays a role in the construction of a biographical subject and why, therefore, an accurate representation of a biographical subject is ultimately impossible' (2016a, 5). Lackey's view opposes Schabert's claim that biographical fictions are 'a special kind of biography rather than a sub-genre of the novel' with the adjective 'fictional' indicating their imaginative approach (1990, 4) rather than their veracity. The debate is ongoing and perhaps irresolvable.

ii. Telling the 'truth'

A novel can be as accurate as a history in telling what happened

Richard Slotkin, 2005, par. 1.

Authors discuss conflicting truths in their research and their endeavours to give voice to diverse versions of events. Julia Alvarez found in writing the lives of the Mirabel sisters 'the facts kept shifting depending on who I talked to ... someone's fact became another's fiction' (2014, 31). Deirdre Bair, in her biography of Simone de Beauvoir, sought 'to determine which sister's memory was the more valid.' 'How was I to present the "real truth"?' she asks (2019, 253). Jay Parini observes that 'even as history happens, it shifts, complicates, and confuses. Each person around us sees the same events differently, with a subjective lens firmly in place' (2016, 25). While historians and traditional biographers are ethically constrained against manipulating or extrapolating documented evidence, biographical novels 'tend to be multilayered and multi-perspectival texts, taking into account their subjects' varying conceptions of themselves, their memory images' (Schabert 1990, 35). By engaging multiple points of

view, authors can present the reader with a choice of conclusions, or leave the conclusion unstated, as with Grace Marks' guilt or innocence in Atwood's *Alias Grace* (Douglas-Peters 2015, 301). Parini, who writes both biographical novels and traditional biographies, claims that 'a biography, like a novel, is simply one version of reality, more or less true depending on the depth of the author's knowledge and the extent of his or her imagination and sympathy' (2017 [1997] 312). He describes fiction as a 'method' using some of the same techniques as historical narrative but with the added freedom to open the imagination and explore the consciousness of its subjects (Parini 2016, 23). He explains:

Biographical novels take ... as significant characters actual people who lived in time and open outward from that narrative, and while keeping to the agreed-upon-facts, nevertheless shine a flashlight into the darker corners of history and try to imagine what was really going on (2014, 206).

Parini asserts that by applying the techniques of fiction writing to an historical work, it is possible to depict a more intense truth than the constraints of traditional biography permit (2016, 22).

Are the resulting texts works of fact or fiction? Hutcheon argues that by rethinking the limits of our social and creative conventions, post-modern theory has queried that demarcation: 'The most radical boundaries crossed have been between fiction and non-fiction' (1988, 10). Bakhtin's analyses suggest that heteroglossia (the presence of two or more viewpoints in a text) is embedded in all discourse, giving scope for expressing layers of meaning from different perspectives and social belief systems (1981, 288). The relative or 'multi-voiced' nature of literary and language systems, in his opinion, frees the author from a unitary or conclusive view, fusing 'the language of truth' with 'the language of the everyday' (1981, 315). He asserts that authors' intentions are refracted through their characters' diverse use of language. A degree of interpretation is inherent in all language choices, as Hayden White pointed out (1976, 253).

As well as highlighting the representative function of language, White admonishes historians for failing to recognise that 'facts' are not found but constructed by the kind of questions the researcher asks (1966, 127). He draws a distinction between literal and imaginative truths, with no single version privileged over another but judged on the richness of their depiction (1966, 130). Lackey makes a similar comparison, explaining

that ‘like the best historians, the most gifted biographical novelists are experts who give readers certain types of “truths”’ (2017b, 345). He explores how the truths of biofiction can supplement the historical record or provide new insights into past lives (345). Griffiths views history and fiction as genres that deliver different truths in a symbiotic relationship. ‘Sometimes one or the other is more clearly demanded by the political or social moment,’ he explains (2009, 74.4).

Contemporary writers have revolutionised the practice of biography and provided new ways of thinking about major historical events by engaging creative imagination and fictional devices in telling a life story, writes Lackey (2017b, 343-344). However, he cautions that works of biofiction should be regarded as fiction not biography (2016a, 5). Monica Latham contests this demarcation. She views biofiction as: ‘A life writing genre [that] lies at the confluence of authenticity (conferred by biography) and imagination (as authors explore other possible avenues and give their readers access to the imagined inner lives of the characters)’ (2012, 355) and reveals ‘different layers of truths and pluralism of realities’ thus offering possibilities denied to conventional biographies (356). Therefore, Latham asserts, writers of biofiction can offer their readers both a truthful assessment of events and characters from the past and the pleasure of engaging with a literary text (2014, 117). ‘The sense of “knowing” what an individual was like can be acquired through ... both fictional and non-fictional portrayals,’ explains Laura Saxton (2020, 131). David Lodge claims that ‘the biographical novel makes no attempt to disguise its hybrid nature.’ He explains that, each writer sets themselves different rules about the balance between fact and fiction (2006, 9).

Biography rests somewhat uneasily in the margins of written history. Leon Edel defines biography as a creative endeavour: ‘a work of the imagination – the imagination of form and style and narrative. The biographer is allowed to be as imaginative as he [sic] pleases, so long as he does not imagine his facts’ (1978, 1). John Keener explains ‘biographical narrative operates somewhere between what we might call “historical” and “novelistic” discourse,’ claiming that it is more a practice than a genre (2001, 159, 161). Although traditional biographies purport to be based on factual information and documentary evidence, the foregrounding of an individual invariably distorts the historical record (Lackey 2016b, 33; Keener 2001, 180). According to Schabert, both fictional and traditional biographies are concerned with interpreting evidence; their

difference is in the creative use the author makes of the documentation and the reader's engagement with it:

Both fictional and factual biographies are based on the facts of history and of an individual's life and both, in the sense that they are constructs made up from the facts, are fictions. Yet the constructs are different in kind ... fictional elements destroy the reliability of the text as a source of factual information whereas factual narrative interferes with the imaginative vision (Schabert 1982, 13).

The key difference, she suggests, is that fictional biographies can indicate an inner life of their characters through selective interpretation of the evidence, a technique that would not stand the factual verification required of non-fiction (1982, 12). However, non-fiction biography also relies on a degree of speculation to bridge lacunae in the documented record and by foregrounding the role of an individual can distort past events.

Biography differs from history in its focus on a single person whereas history concerns itself with the wider society (Brien 2015, 5). 'Biography remains largely understood by readers as telling straightforward, factual, historically accurate life stories. Yet due to the (unavoidable) interpretative element involved in their creation, all biography can be posited to be speculative to some degree,' asserts Brien (2015, 3). She observes that many contemporary biographers acknowledge that their narrative is only one possible version of the subject's life. 'The "speculative" biographer extends and supports the account generated by this evidence, by (re)inserting into the narrative biographical elements without which the life story of the subject is incomplete ... [including] emotional responses, thoughts and motivations,' Brien explains. (2015, 4). Brien and Lindsey argue that such speculation, whether acknowledged or implicit, can be evaluated on a spectrum (2022, 7-8). I have argued elsewhere that a fact/fiction spectrum or continuum provides an effective tool for situating texts according to their degree of speculation or imaginative incursions (Chappell 2022).

Authors of biographical fiction emphasise that the 'facts' do matter and underpin the author's 'contract' with the reader even when the work is recognisably fiction. 'Facts – actual names, dates, places and events – are the building blocks of biographical novels, and writers who ignore them do so at their peril,' cautions Parini (2019, par. 11).

Suzannah Scaparo explains how archival evidence provides the framework for recovering life stories and ‘Factual events act as a scaffolding’ (2005, 128). Tunca and Ledent indicate that the underpinning documentary evidence in biographical fiction enhances credibility and expands our understanding of past lives that have been overlooked or biased by traditional Western historiography: ‘The focus on a person whose life can be documented in traditional historical terms, through archives or other materials, confers a form of authentication’ (2020, 341). They assert that there can be no prescriptive definition of biographical fiction, describing it as a critical method rather than a genre category (2020, 339). Saxton argues a difference between accuracy – the extent to which a text’s representation is consistent with available evidence – and authenticity, which relates to verisimilitude in an historical text. Authenticity can be enhanced by accurate detail from the period, intertextual inclusions, and cultural and subjective perceptions. However, because it represents gaps or details lost from the historical record, its accuracy cannot be verified, she explains (2020, 129).

Some authors claim that biography embellished by speculation and imagination can be more realistic than an account limited by documentary evidence. Brien gives examples where speculative biographies have displayed:

the rich potential for authors of utilising speculative and other hybrid writing strategies to produce biographies that are rich, appealing and thought provoking, historically informed narratives of real lives and experience – especially in those cases when the historical record, and other evidence is incomplete, unreliable or otherwise lacking (Brien and Eades 2018, 25).

Imaginative reconstruction of the lives of women and minority groups, neglected or misrepresented in archival records, enables their stories to be told (Scaparo 2005, 90, 162). Scaparo argues that fiction is the only means by which these lost voices can be recovered (90).

Life writing scholars dispute the relationship between fact and fiction in the biographical novel. Novak suggests that ‘biographical and fictional narratives can be viewed through the same analytical grid, their approach resonates with White’s famous postulation of the non-distinction between fact and fiction due to their mutual narrativism’ (2017a, 6-7). She examines the opposing arguments of Dorrit Cohn, who

maintains the level of referentiality in a narrative qualifies it as fiction or non-fiction (1990, 782). Novak asserts that Cohn's definition is difficult to apply to many works of biographical fiction based on documented evidence. 'What extent or proportion of non-referential (imaginary) elements would "contaminate" a work of non-fiction and thus render it fiction?' she asks (2017a, 7).

The argument for evaluating biographical and historical works on a fact-fiction continuum was proposed by Keener in 2001. He argued that biographical 'truth' was largely a matter of selection and writing technique (44). He situated biographical works between historical and novelistic discourse in terms of their narrative style (159). Novak endorsed and expanded on Keener's formula to propose a fact/fiction spectrum to evaluate cross-genre life writing texts. She disputed Cohn's (1990, 779) and others' insistence on referentiality as a benchmark of non-fiction, citing works of biographical fiction that are built on referential and documented evidence (2017a, 8). She asserts:

If the truth value of life-writing is seen as dependent on specific formal strategies of representation ... experiments with auto/biographical form will almost automatically shed doubt (and light too) on the ontological status of the represented life, that is, the text's position on the fact/fiction spectrum and consequently its truth value (2017a, 6).

Novak's proposal is supported by contemporary scholars and authors including Tunca and Ledent (2020, 343), Bethany Layne (2018a, 180), Brien and Lindsey (2022, 8) and Rosalind Barber (2010, 166). Barber points out that authors of literary biography and historical fiction frequently engage with the same archival material and both are prone to subjective interpretation and selectivity (2010, 166). Latham suggests that the fictional world of a novel becomes more plausible when characters bring their real-life biographical data to the text (2014, 107).

While debate over the accuracy or credibility of biographical novels has abounded, less attention has been focussed on their worth as fiction (Caulfield 2019, 2). Thomas Mallon demands 'imaginative elbow room', claiming that the historical or biographical novelist's prime obligation is to literature (2017 [2011], 61). Lindsey explains that she did not want to 'burden' *Wild Love*, her biography of nineteenth-century Australian artist Adelaide Ironside, with 'exhaustive historical facts' (2023, xv). Barbara Mujica agrees: 'Facts can bog you down. They can overpower your characters and drain them of

vitality.’ She recommends selectivity of details in pursuit of an engaging narrative (2017, 89). By writing from an alternative point of view, possibly using a fictional narrator, the subjectivity of both the fictional voice and the official history can become clearer (Mujica 2017, 94). Gillian Polack posits that novelists privilege their role as story tellers over historical accuracy, with historical detail creating an emotional awareness rather than scholarly interpretation of the past (2014, 526). Biographical fiction, as a hybrid genre, can experiment with different layers of truth and realities (Latham 2012, 356). Irving Stone places high demands on both the historical and narrative qualities of the biographical novel: ‘It must recreate the individual against the background of his [sic] times, with all its authentic historical flavour, and it must live up to the exacting demands of the novel structure’ (2017 [1957], 115). These opposing opinions imply that the biographical novel is an inherently conflicted form.

Such distinctions are only contested if we regard fiction and non-fiction as mutually exclusive. Keener argues that the binary division between historical and fictional biography breaks down when referential systems are introduced (2001, 160). Novak’s similar suggestion of ‘truth value’ on a fact/fiction spectrum (2017a, 6) or Brien and Lindsey’s ‘speculative spectrum’ (2022, 8) position the balance between accuracy and invention, or empirical versus imaginative truth, as an authorial, stylistic decision, defined by paratextual markers, as discussed below (4 vi.), rather than binary opposites. Lindsey proposes that ‘the biographer constantly tests and refines their speculations about the evidence as they inform their imaginations and construct a convincing “life world”’ (Brien and Lindsey 2022, 41). Latham (2014, 117), Stone (2017 [1957], 129) and Lindsey (2018, 3) argue that biographical credibility and reader engagement within the world of the text are simultaneously possible. However, the enriched literary style generally associated with fiction delivers a different expectation that can compromise a text’s credibility in the eyes of the reader.

iii. The relational other

The relational dimension is fundamental to all human experience

Paul John Eakin 2019, 57.

Life writing, while traditionally glorifying the protagonist in biography (S Smith 1993, 393; Tridgell 2004, 103), inevitably involves contact with other people – family and community members, colleagues or opponents – who situate a life story in its context.

Eakin (2019, 43) synthesised previous studies by Mary Mason (1980) and Nancy Miller (1994), which had mainly looked at the concept of relationality in women's lives, to posit that all life narratives are relational and that relational identity is characteristic of auto/biography.

Eakin concludes that despite differences in narrative style that display gender differences, all self-writing includes others. 'The relational dimension is fundamental to all human experience,' he writes, because the concept of identity is developed collaboratively within family and community, underscoring its relationality (2019, 57). In her foundational study, Mason included both biographies and biographical novels in her analysis of women's life writing although her discussion focusses on autobiography, suggesting that the development and definition of identity by way of a relational other is a constant in women's life writing but often absent from that of men (1980, 231). Miller expands Mason's premise that male autobiographies 'present the self as a stage for battle of opposing forces ... which does not accord with the deepest realities of women's experience and so is inappropriate as a model for women's life writing' (1994, par. 2). However, Miller asks whether gender is a defining factor for relationality in life writing and whether the definition of autobiographical self, connected to a significant 'other' and as part of a family and community, might apply across all life-writing. In this she foreshadows the later work of Eakin (Miller 1994, par. 10).

Gendered differences in styles of communication translate to differences in life-writing between men and women, maintains Adriana Cavarero (2000, 62). She explains that women are more likely to tell life stories – their friendship groups and conversation revolve around life and family events rather than an exchange of ideas – whereas male friendship is rarely of a narrative style and their conversation is more likely about things like sport or cars or occupational discussion than about 'who' they are. Cavarero emphasises the 'narrative character of female friendships', suggesting that 'the autobiographical text replaces the storytelling friend' for both writer and reader (2000, 75).

The discontinuous and fragmentary nature of memory prompts us to seek unity in constructing our story and to desire reciprocal storytelling from others, illustrating how identity is intertwined with relational others (Cavarero 2000, 35, 88). Building on the work of Cavarero, Maria Tamboukou explores the idea of the 'narratable self' wanting to

hear her story told by others (2010, 171). Novak describes these others as ‘reflector characters’ whose perspectives highlight events in a biographic subject’s life (2016, 92).

Writing a life from the perspective of relational others can highlight character flaws in the protagonist as well as differing opinions among the ‘spectators’ on that life. Tamboukou explains how narrative practice can reveal the vulnerability of individuals and relate them to others in stories that recount history through the memory of spectators rather than participants in significant events (2010, 170-171). She suggests that where conflicting versions occur, the question is not about truth versus fiction but modes of representation, memory and context (2010, 173), a question that is similarly identified and explored in the work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010, 6).

Feminist commentators in the 1970s disputed the style of traditional biography focusing on a singular, autonomous (usually male) person as not sufficiently reflecting the relational nature of both male and female lives (Tridgell 2004, 104). Susan Tridgell interrogates the cultural assumptions that are built into traditional Western biographies that foreground a particular person (2004, 106). She embraces the conflict arising from more than one point of view, arguing that biography can give voice to opposing opinions by striking the right balance of sympathies (2004, 187). She concludes that ‘biographies may be valuable for reminding us that selves can be seen in a variety of ways and that no single conception of the self should oust all others’ (2004, 114). This statement echoes White’s dictum that there is no single correct version of events (1966, 130).

Multiple narrators have the potential to deliver a layered and nuanced portrayal. This can be defined as a ‘braided narrative’ wherein several stories both intertwine and conflict to contribute to a single plotline (Bancroft 2018, 263). Corinne Bancroft uses this term to describe works that have several narrators whose accounts link their characters through interconnected layers of history or experience (263). She claims that: ‘Braided narratives are necessarily novels not only because, as Bakhtin points out, the novel “incorporates other [genres] into its own peculiar structure,” but also because [they] do the work often attributed to novels, such as imagining communities’ (270). However, the term ‘braided narrative’ was coined by American historian David Fisher for his ‘combination of story-telling and problem solving’ in his cultural history series of America (1989, xi) and also used by Brenda Miller to describe her creative non-fiction essays (2012, 241). I contest Bancroft’s claim that braided narratives are necessarily

novels. Not only have several narratologists applied Bakhtin's theories to cross-genre and non-fiction texts, as discussed below (2 iv), but historians have also explored plurality in communities (Denning 1992, 1998; Lindsey et al. 2022b).

Although not specifically citing Bakhtin, Eakin draws attention to 'the notion of autobiography in which the focus is, paradoxically, on someone else's story' (2019, 56). He predicts this duality will lead to increased attention to memoir and contemporary life writing as credible genres for exposing the relational nature of identity by placing the individual life in a context of family and community. Narratives where the story of self is presented as relational to others defy boundaries between genres. 'They offer not only the autobiography of the self but the biography and autobiography of the other,' Eakin explains (2019, 58). He emphasises the collaborative nature of identity developed by surrounding conversation and the reflection of others (65-66): 'The identity shaping environments [in the auto/biographies he studied] are nested one within the other – self, family, community set in a physical and cultural geography, in an unfolding history' (85). The opportunity for biofiction to embellish its narrative with those contextual and sensory details not usually included in archival records enhances its ability to anchor a narrative in a particular historical and cultural context (Saxton 2020, 136).

The interactive nature of mirrored narratives is valuable in discussions of class, race or gender. Such narratives emphasise differences between the cultural systems from which they are written. Susanna Egan (1999) coined the term 'mirror talk' to describe the encounter of two or more narrative voices as well as the duality of the narrator's recognition of the perceptions of others as well as their self-identity (1999, 3). When both subjects are involved in constructing the text, narration becomes dialogic. Egan cites Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* (1990 [1933]) as an exemplar of the relationship between biographer and subject or relational other (1999, 8) where dialogue facilitates a mutual recognition between subjects. Egan observes how recovered voices of the colonised or marginalised can exercise control over their own narratives: 'They talk back, not to implode the margins upon the centre, but to decentralise the telling of their lives' (1999, 11). The concept of decentring a biographical account is not only useful for the recovery of marginalised voices but also addresses the prime criticism of biography as a distortion of historical record by its focus on an individual.

iv. Heteroglossia and polyphony

Polyphony or ventriloquism has a lot to do with power and authority

Cooren and Sandler 2014, par. 40.

Fictional texts, and also biographies and autobiographies when the inclusion of relational others is considered, are not stylistically uniform, but contain the languages and speech types of a multiplicity of people, both narrator(s) and characters. Bakhtin posited that multiple meanings are embedded in all narratives:

The author manifests himself and his point of view not only in his effect on the narrator, on his speech and languages, but also in his effect on the subject of the story – a point of view that differs from the point of view of the narrator ... Behind the narrator's story we read a second story, the author's story (1981, 313).

Bakhtin argued that language is rarely unitary but is the product of social and cultural development and contains many layers of meaning. Close reading of a text reveals these multiple and stratified interpretations. Heteroglossia gives voice to different social and historical speech types in a narrative. Bakhtin maintains that such diversity is fundamental to the writing of novelistic prose which, by definition, contains a variety of language styles and several distinct voices (1981, 262-264).

Language is stratified not only by obvious class or ethnicity but also more subtly by social groups, generational differences and political and professional jargon to present different shades of meaning reflecting different belief systems and opinions. 'All languages of heteroglossia ... are specific points of view of the world ... each characterised by its own objects, meanings and values,' Bakhtin maintains (291). He explains that an author speaks through the language of their characters, in the nature of a ventriloquist (299). Bakhtin's concept of analysing language not only focusses on close reading of texts, particularly archival material, but also informs writing techniques when reinventing dialogue.

Bakhtin's statements on dialogue are particularly relevant to writing re-imagined conversations. He maintains that in any dialogue 'a significant number of words can be

identified that are implicitly or explicitly admitted as someone else's' (354). He observes that this applies from casual remarks through to major ideological speeches. Much speech is repeating or evaluating the words of others, he points out: 'In real life people talk most of all about what others talk about' (338). Bakhtin observes this speech diversity in the novel, maintaining that each layer of language style represents a point of view and reveals the cultural system it represents:

Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess at and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi levelled, containing more and more varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror (414).

Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia reveals the possibilities of amplifying social and cultural differences in characters through language, thus indicating the scope for multi-narrator works of creative non-fiction as well as biographical novels.

Building on Bakhtin's theories, Francois Cooren and Sergei Sandler explore the significance of heteroglossia and polyphony in general communication (2014). They draw on Bakhtin's notions of ventriloquy and polyphony to analyse sample conversations to illustrate how various forms of multiple voices and meanings are actualised. Their observations support Bakhtin's theory that the 'self' is defined by dialogic relations with others (Bakhtin 1981, 282). 'A multiplicity of voices and intentions can be, and routinely is, heard simultaneously, even within single words,' they found (Cooren and Sandler 2014, par. 14). This finding is significant for the construction of biofiction using multiple voices.

Consideration of embedded ventriloquism in discourse questions who is speaking. This complex analysis of personal narratives or conversations is discussed by Sidonie Smith (1993) and Cooren and Sandler (2014). The latter take the example of a newspaper report: Is it the voice of the journalist, the publication itself, the subject being interviewed or 'the media' in general (Cooren and Sandler 2014, par. 22)? They also suggest, from their analyses of conversations, that 'polyphony or ventriloquism has a lot to do with power and authority to the extent that adding voices to your own voice can constitute a very effective way to lend weight to what you are saying' (2014, par. 40). Awareness of multiple voices and meanings, as discussed here, can provide a valuable

tool for close reading of texts and archival material in search of alternative interpretations and meanings, as well as informing the construction of a biographic narrative.

Sidonie Smith examines how life stories, marginalised or omitted by traditional recording because of race, gender or class, can be reconsidered by exploring the multiple narratives of identity within their social context. She is critical of female biographies which echo the traditional male presentation of an exceptional, heroic figure, pointing out that ‘alternative histories of the subject call for alternative forms of life writing’ (S Smith 1993, 396). Cultural context and the author’s own relationship to the subject provide further lenses for retelling past lives, Smith explains (1993, 397). She raises questions about whose life story is being told and whose voice is used, and finds that collaborative life writing projects are clearly polyphonic, thus giving an enhanced understanding of the subject. ‘Through this multiplication of voices and discourses the interviewers situate their subject in a specific yet complex cultural history,’ she explains (1993, 400).

In collaborative or multi-voiced life writing the control of the author is backgrounded and the authority of the first-person narration is queried. ‘Thus, both the author and subject are decentred,’ Smith observes, so we can know the subject in various ways (1993, 400). She explains that a multi-voiced narrative encourages the reader to listen for polyphony and thus debate the various perspectives, ‘truth claims’ and interpretations (1993, 402). Smith’s statement on biographic writing aligns with Bakhtin’s theory on the power of heteroglossia to decentre characters in a novel.

In the wake of White’s postulation that writing of history shares many characteristics with the novel because it is essentially narrative and selective and interpretation is inherent in language, Peter Burke called attention to conflicting points of view in documented records (1991, 6). He advocated that historians could make past events more comprehensible by ‘following the model of the novelists who tell their stories from more than one viewpoint. It is odd that this device has not been taken more seriously by historians ... To allow the varying and opposing voices of the dead to be heard again, the historian needs, like the novelist, to practice heteroglossia’ (1991, 238-239). He cited examples from fiction where alternative endings were offered to illuminate

possible outcomes as an example that historians might follow (1991, 240). In non-fiction, however, the reader typically is led towards a definitive conclusion.

The process of totalising, drawing materials together to impose a conclusion that promotes unity and comprehension, is common to both historical and fictional narratives. However, post-modern theory has contested this practice. Hutcheon points out: 'A plot ... is always a totalising representation that integrates multiple and scattered events into a unified story.' While drawing a conclusion gives narrative closure, it is arbitrary and interpretative, discounting alternative possibilities (Hutcheon 2002, 66).

Traditionally historians saw their role as establishing a connection between the past they write about and the present in which they are working by imposing an order onto unstructured and fragmented information. Post-modern theory opposes the concepts of unity and closure as limiting interpretation (Hutcheon 2002, 66-68). Hutcheon describes the 'doubleness that characterises all historical narrative' – the separation of the 'facts' from the narration and interpretation that underlies them – as dependant on the cultural and social context of their reporting, as is demonstrated by women's recordings in the past (2002, 72). By actively seeking out and giving voice to multiple, and often opposing, perspectives, both written history and works of fiction can deliver a richer, more contextualised depiction of past lives.

v. Comparative texts

Biographers aim to explore fresh angles, reveal new aspects of 'truth' in writing the lives of other, usually famous, people, whether their work is classified as fiction or non-fiction. Lehman interrogates the credibility of the biographical novel, pointing out that while a non-fiction text has factual status that a biographical novel does not, the accuracy of both is determined by reader perceptions (1997, 21). James Phelan points out that authors of literary non-fiction can embellish and alter characters and events only 'within the limits imposed by the responsibility to [their] extra-textual existence' (2009, 8). Eric Heyne elaborates on that distinction, emphasising that authors of fiction are not held to the same standards of verification as historians (2001, 329). These complementary opinions indicate how creative biographies/biographical novels can supply a meaningful adjunct to traditional biography. Latham maintains that they can 'transcend the limits and constraints of traditional biography' by combining factual research with creative

dexterity (2012, 356). Novak similarly observes that biographical novels can engage the reader either as a work of fiction or biography (2016, 101).

Two biographical novels, *Alias Grace* and *The Last Station*, provide examples of the technique of engaging multiple narrators to interpret a complex and multi-faceted life. The authors of each posit that only through the techniques of fiction writing can we understand the emotions and motivations of their characters. Like my treatment of Spence, they engage relational characters to write the life of their subject from multiple perspectives.

Alias Grace, Margaret Atwood (1997)

I felt that, to be fair, I had to represent all points of view

Margaret Atwood, 1998, 1515.

Atwood's novel, based on documents from the trial of the maid Grace Marks for the murder of her employer in mid-nineteenth century Canada, is narrated in a fictionalised diary style by the protagonist with intertextual excerpts from newspapers, court documents, historical accounts and poetry plus fictional letters and comments by Marks' imagined doctor/analyst. Atwood reflects on her deliberate interrogation of the binary fiction/non-fiction definition: 'I felt that, to be fair, I had to represent all points of view'; 'I devised the following set of guidelines for myself: Where there was solid fact, I could not alter it ... the gaps left unfilled, I was free to invent' (1998, 1515). Her juxtaposition of fiction and non-fiction narratives highlights a tension and contradiction between memory and official records (Staels 2000, 431). Atwood explains the contradictions she uncovered in the archival material on Grace Marks' trial. 'I have not changed any known facts, although the written accounts are so contradictory that few facts emerge as unequivocally "known",' she writes in the author's afterword to *Alias Grace* (1997, 541).

The multiplicity of texts that make up the novel demonstrate the shades of opinion and multi-faceted versions of Grace's story in what Joan Douglas-Peters describes as a 'unique structural polyphony' (2015, 300). Grace's first-person narrative is interrupted by her own reflections on memory and truth, such as 'That is what they wanted me to say,' and '[Mr MacKenzie] said it was not a lie, as that is what must have happened, whether I remembered it or not' (Atwood 1997, 368). Opposing Grace's recollections are newspaper reports of her trial, excerpts of her confession and a non-fiction account

portraying Grace in the lunatic asylum. By presenting the various texts, *Alias Grace* indicates that the real truth cannot be recovered. The novel illustrates that ‘layers of texts stand between the reader and the people and events it seeks to represent,’ writes Michael Magali-Cornier (2001, 425). He maintains that this technique offers a reinterpretation of history by viewing events and characters through competing lenses thus highlighting different types of texts. Magali-Cornier describes the narrative technique of *Alias Grace* as ‘undermining any clear distinction between different kinds of texts – in particular between texts that western culture traditionally has authorised (such as official documents and published texts) and those it has devalued (such as oral tales)’ (425). Thereby, it also disputes the privileged male authority of archival collections over more traditional women’s writing of letters, diaries and memoir (Douglas-Peters 2015, 302; Lanser 1986, 353).

Alias Grace demonstrates heteroglossia or multi-voicedness through its repeated inclusions of intertextual documents within Grace’s telling of her life story. Grace relays dialogue and in doing so echoes others’ voices: ‘Nancy told him gaily to be quiet and behave himself, or she would have to punish him and stop reading, she would play the piano instead; and Mr Kinnear laughed and said he could endure any form of torture but that’ (Atwood 1997, 323). Grace’s narrative meets Bakhtin’s definition of speech that ‘permits a multiplicity of social voices and ... interrelationships’ (1981, 263). This is most clearly demonstrated in Grace’s echoing of Mary Whitney: ‘lady or lady’s maid, they both piss and it smells the same, and not like lilacs neither as Mary Whitney used to say’ (Atwood 1997, 251). Under hypnosis Mary becomes Grace’s alter-ego and implies guilt for committing the murder (Atwood 1997, 468). No conclusion is given as to Grace’s culpability, which underscores the multiplicity of interpretations in documented material (Douglas-Peters 2015, 301). This absence of narrative closure parallels authorial denial of moral judgement, according to John O’Neill (2013, 662). He cites White’s observation that narrative closure is inevitably moralising (663). Instead, Atwood employs a post-modern pattern of questioning the accessibility of ‘truth’ (665).

The relationships and social differences between characters in *Alias Grace* are amplified by polyphonic and competing narratives. Douglas-Peters (2015, 302) and Cristie March (1997, par. 1) both cite Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia in their analyses of the layers of meaning in *Alias Grace*’s complex structure. Douglas-Peters points out

that Grace's 'women's discourse' stands in dialogical opposition to the historical documents and unified 'male' discourse of Dr Jordan, to emphasise their gendered difference (2015, 302). March extends the exploration of overlapping layers of language and understanding to the social heteroglossia surrounding objects in the novel (1997, par. 8). Grace appropriates the clothes of Nancy, who has died, and by inference the personality of the dead woman becomes a subtext for the characters. Similarly, Dr Jordan's bringing fruit and vegetables to elicit deeper meanings in his interviews with Grace is subverted by her greater understanding (March 1997, par. 16). 'The apple is the Tree of Knowledge, is what he means. Good and Evil. Any child could guess it. But I will not oblige. I go back to my stupid look,' Grace says (Atwood 1997, 45). Douglas-Peters concludes that a Bakhtinian reading of *Alias Grace* reveals not only its feminist discourse but also a more complex metafictional understanding (2015, 318). Grace frequently refers to the fragmented nature of memory in her own narrative: 'In scraps like a plate that's been broken. There are always some pieces that would seem to belong to another plate altogether' (Atwood 1997, 118). Her awareness of the constructedness of her own story – '[Prison] is a place where you have a lot of time to think, and no-one to tell your thoughts to, so you tell them to yourself' (Atwood 1997, 186) – illustrates the elusive quality of a true story. Earl Ingersoll points out that the metafictional quality of *Alias Grace* and its post-modernity are emphasised by avoiding a totalising conclusion (2001, 392). The use of multiple narrators and intertextual elements highlights layers of interpretation and the elusiveness of a single conclusion. Where fiction and factual elements are juxtaposed the validity of both is levelled (Magali-Cornier 2001, 421).

Alias Grace follows the conventions of the nineteenth-century realist novel, of which Spence's early works, particularly *Clara Morison*, have been categorised as early Australian examples (Staels 2000, 431; Magarey 1995, 29-30). Everyday domestic details anchor the narrative in its era and provide the contextual and sensory detail that is one of the hallmarks of biographical fiction, and contributes to its sense of verisimilitude (Schabert 1990, 87; Mantel, 2017, Reith lecture 4). For example:

The floor was dirty as a stable and I wondered when it had last been given a good cleaning. I'd swept it first, of course, and now I was washing it in the proper way, kneeling down with each knee on an old clout because of the hardness of the stone, and with my shoes and stockings off, because to do a good job you had to get right

down to it, and my sleeves rolled up past the elbows and my skirt pulled back between my legs and tucked behind the sash of my apron (Atwood 1997, 319).

Atwood points out that these details of daily life went unrecorded because they were common knowledge and considered too mundane and insignificant to write down (1998, 1514). Hilary Mantel similarly emphasises the importance of recovering the minutiae of daily life in writing past lives (2017, Reith lecture 4). The domestic grounding of Grace's story underpins not only the conditions of the time in which she lived but also the circumscribed lives of working-class women.

From the multiple texts incorporated into Atwood's telling of Grace Marks' life, I have recognised the value of Spence's novels as a cultural reference and her newspaper articles and extant letters as sources of polyphonic narratives in recovering her story. Magali-Cornier concludes that Atwood's intertextual excerpts give voice to the fragments of cultural and social fabric through which lives from the past can be recovered (2001, 441). Atwood's juxtaposition of the documented and the imagined in *Alias Grace* confronts our notion of 'truth' as well as our expectation of one prevailing version of events. Magali-Cornier points out that by demonstrating the connection between fiction and non-fiction texts that traditionally have been differentiated, *Alias Grace* promotes a graduation of 'truth value' (2001, 426), a claim in accord with Keener's continuum (2001, 1) or Novak's fact/fiction spectrum (2017a, 6), which informs my writing of Spence.

The Last Station, Jay Parini (2007a [1990])

I approached the story from a half a dozen viewpoints

Jay Parini 2017, 301.

The Last Station tells the story of Leo Tolstoy's final year, from the perspectives of members of his household. Parini's description of this work as a 'biographical novel', emphasises the genre's ability to expose fresh perspectives on events and people from the past. He describes his technique of writing from several subjective viewpoints: 'In *The Last Station*, you are hearing from Tolstoy's wife, one of his daughters, his publisher and his secretary ... you are hearing the same story told from different angles of experience. By layering these viewpoints there is a technique here for accessing truth' (2014, 211). Parini claims that his techniques offer opportunities for understanding not available to historians (211).

Diaries and memoirs written by each of his characters provide the basis for dialogue and introspection. Parini does not mention Bakhtinian theory in his reflections on *The Last Station*, (2014; 2017 [1997]); however, his account of his writing process follows Bakhtin's explanation of multiple voices evident in narrative as a 'refraction of authorial intentions' (1981, 313):

I based this book on the various diaries that were written by friends and family around Tolstoy. Frequently the diaries overlapped, and so I got a real sense of how Tolstoy actually talked, as they recorded him speaking to his servants, to friends, his wife and children. I felt I was able to work my way imaginatively into Tolstoy's world with the help of these texts (Parini 2007b, 56).

He explains that *The Last Station* uses six narrative voices to present different angles and create opportunities to explore aspects of Tolstoy's final year, thus expanding versions of the 'truth' (2007b, 56; 2014, 211).

The diaries Parini uses as source material contain polyphonic accounts where characters report on interactions and conversations with others, to capture their voices as well as the writer's. For instance, Tolstoy's secretary Bulgakov relates a conversation he had about political interference and lack of sympathy for the socialist cause (Parini 2007a [1990], 13-14); extracts from actual letters written by each of Tolstoy's children offer different versions of their mother's attempted suicide (Parini 2007a [1990], 307-313). Parini expects his reader will be at least broadly acquainted with Tolstoy and his novels. Allusions such as 'he was doing research, preparing to write the great battle scenes of Borodino, the scenes that have made *War and Peace* part of the consciousness of Russia' (2007a [1990], 157) assume knowledge of that novel. Similarly, Tolstoy's wife recalls how 'day after day, during the composition of *Anna*' [Karenina] she would 'wake up dreaming about Vronsky, Levin, Kitty wondering what would next befall them' (69). These authorial assumptions demonstrate Lehman's theory that both the author and the reader bring experience and expectations to their interpretation of narrative (1997, 3). Lehman focussed his argument on works of non-fiction, maintaining that texts that depend on the materiality of characters and reference to events outside the narrative engage the reader on a more powerful level than works of fiction where the referential

world is wholly within the text (4) although he does concede that cross-genre works depicting real people and events implicate the reader in a similar manner (21).

Parini argues conversely for the power of fiction in his decision to tell Tolstoy's story in the form of a novel:

Having read the diaries of the dozen or so people closest to him, I thought briefly about writing a straight biography of Tolstoy; I quickly, however, began to feel the limitations posed by conventional biography as a genre. One can describe events on the surface, but one can't get into them and under them in the same way that novelists can. What interested me in the case of Tolstoy was not the facts themselves – a half-dozen sound biographies already existed – but the emotional resonance of those facts (2017 [1997], 308).

This statement explains how biofiction can augment traditional biography. Underpinning many works of biofiction are one or more traditional 'cradle to grave' biographies (Lackey 2017a, 194; Novak 2017a, 2). These provide a referential basis for amplified exploration of the subject's life using creative writing techniques to engage readers across the boundary between fictional and non-fictional texts.

The Last Station is the closest example I have discovered to my approach to writing Spence's life and has informed my technique. Two of my narrators left memoirs and biographical recollections of Spence. Her letters provided an account of her day-to-day domestic and political life as well as a source for dialogue. Parini also draws on archival documents to reconstruct conversations: 'Whenever Tolstoy speaks in this novel, I quote his actual words or, less often, I create dialogue based on conversations reported indirectly' (2007a [1990], 371, author note).

The layering of subjective viewpoints illustrates the complexity of writing a past life. Description of events from more than one point of view, coupled with the thoughts and emotions of each narrator, underscores conflict between the 'relational others' in the protagonist's life. In *The Last Station*, the material concerns of Sofya, Tolstoy's wife, and the socialist principles of Tolstoy's disciple Chertkov and other members of his household are manifested in their dispute over Tolstoy's literary legacy. 'They'll do anything to come between me and my husband,' claims Sofya (Parini 2007a [1990], 22). Chertkov tells Tolstoy's new secretary 'She is not one of us [socialists]. I would go so far

as to say that she despises us and would do anything in her power to see that her husband's work does not go forward' (11). Relating this to my own work, conflict within Spence's circle, especially between her niece Lucy and her companion Ellen Gregory and political colleague Jeanne Young, is similarly evident in letters and memoirs. This provides a narrative arc to my interpretation of Spence's life, culminating in a dispute after her death that resulted in her diaries being destroyed.

However, unlike Parini (2014, 211) I would not claim that writing Spence's life from several subjective viewpoints offers 'a technique for accessing truth'. Rather, I suggest, it highlights the subjectivity and multiplicity of interpretations which can be construed as the 'truth'. As Alvarez explained in her explanation of writing the lives of the Mirabel sisters in *In the Time of the Butterflies*, 'The truth is complex, multi-faceted and one person's truth might actually negate another's truth...As a novelist you can find ways to put all or many of those aspects into the narrative...You can actually create *competing* truths' (2014, 29). The relationships each of my narrators had with Spence, documented in their recollections of her, help anchor my narrative in its zeitgeist by underscoring the changing expectations of women's place in society at the end of the nineteenth century.

I have followed Parini's example of using the first-person voice for each narrator. While this confuses the ability to distinguish each individual voice (especially in Parini's case with the complicated Russian nomenclature of the Tolstoy household), it reinforces the veracity of the intertextual excerpts and the underpinning archival references. This echoes Schabert's claim that first-person narration offers an 'illusion of authenticity' as a technique used in both fiction and autobiography/memoir (1990, 93). Although *The Last Station* clearly proclaims its status as a novel (Parini 2014, 209; 2007a [1990], 371), Parini's narrators are quoting from their own diaries or correspondence, thus justifying the use of first-person narrator and conflating the expectations of biography and fiction.

The keeping of diaries and their role in providing varied perspectives is acknowledged by characters within the text. Tolstoy's wife Sofya reflects: 'Before doing anything, I wrote the truth of things in my diary. Otherwise they will read and believe the diaries of Lyovochka and Chertkov' (2007a [1990], 172). Chertkov has custody of Tolstoy's diaries. His statement 'As I leaf through his diary of that period (which I keep hidden in a strong box at Telyatinki) I find the tenor of his voice unmistakable' precedes

a series of extracts from Tolstoy's diaries (163). These comments resonate with accounts of the posthumous struggle over Spence's diaries between Lucy Morice and Jeanne Young (Morice to Franklin, 9 September 1937; Jones 1988, 166) which frame my biographical work on Spence.

Writing a life from the perspective of relational others decentres the subject to convey a broader social critique (Novak 2016, 98). Just as Tolstoy's voice is filtered through his letters and diary in *The Last Station* – we do not have access to his inner thoughts – so Catherine Spence is only heard in my portrayal of her life through her writing and her impression on those relational 'reflector characters' around her (Novak 2016, 92). Such characters, like members of Tolstoy's household in *The Last Station*, can provide reflections of attitudes to class and gender, amplifying these attributes in a main character.

4. Scope of this Project

there is no single correct view of any object...but there are many correct views

Hayden White 1966, 130.

The disputed terrain between history and fiction remains ill-defined but within these blurred boundaries are richly imaginative texts illuminating characters from our past with verisimilitude (Gardiner and Padmore 2022, 5; Tunca and Ledent 2020, 339). My creative biography of Spence grew from this fertile ground. Gardiner and Padmore offer numerous contemporary examples to illustrate how our understanding of biography and historiography have shifted to recognise the role of narrative and speculation (6). The interdisciplinary debate between historiography and narratology provides opportunity to explore the potential for works that reject closure in the text and acknowledge the subjectivity of historiography, according to Christopher Kremmer, who comments that ‘White and Bakhtin make new and exciting conversations possible in an environment in which history and fiction can be defined as competing but complimentary discourses’ (2015, 1). I have similarly drawn on the theoretical concepts of White and Bakhtin to illustrate heteroglossia evident in Spence’s archival records and literary legacy by narrating her life in the manner of fiction, but following the referential style of traditional biography.

The potential for engaging multiple points of view in writing a life from the past has not been fully investigated. The practice of creative biography, narrating a life story embellished by contextual detail and using the techniques of fiction writing, offers the capacity for exploration of a character through the perspectives of relational others in their life, by close reading of archival material for heteroglossia. My creative biography of Spence draws on documented sources to recover her life story reflected through the voices of those close to her like a series of (imagined) oral history interviews. It engages ‘responsible imagination’ (Schabert 1990, 147) to illuminate rather than totalise the differing points of view in written accounts by and about her to portray a complex and sometimes controversial life and thus provides an alternative model for biographic exploration.

The capacity of fiction to represent different understandings or facets of a character has been evident since the evolution of the novel in the eighteenth century. An early example of the use of biofiction to illustrate the opposing points of view of the coloniser

and colonised is Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land* (1947). Dark tells the story of the arrival of the British fleet in Botany Bay through the voices of Captain-Lieutenant Watkin Tench and First Nations man, Bennelong. Contested versions are the essence of historical debate. However, the public expects a definitive view of history and is disturbed by historians disagreeing among themselves (McKenna 2006, 98). Although the practice of reaching a single conclusion has been challenged by post-modern historiography (Burke 1991; White 1966), the writing of history and biography is predominantly totalised (Hutcheon 2002, 59). My multi-perspectival approach to biography offers the opportunity to highlight diverse interpretations.

Saxton claims that public conversation reflects 'a continued unease in the melding of fact and fiction in the one narrative' (2020, 128), which my practice explores. However, while my project deliberately confronts the boundary between fiction and non-fiction, detailed study of reader engagement with such cross-genre works is beyond the scope of this thesis. Building on the work of Lehman (1997), Phelan (2009), Latham (2012, 2014) and others, further investigation of reader reception of biography at the confluence of history and fiction is indicated.

5. Methodology

As is common for practice-led projects in creative writing, this work is interdisciplinary. It draws on the theoretical frameworks of post-modern history, feminism and narratology. Previous evaluations and depictions of Spence's life and works have been from either the academic orientation of history (Magarey 2010 [1985]; Magarey et al. 2005; Jones 1986; Kingston 2001) or literary criticism (Thomson 1987; Walker 2004; Sharp 2019). By exploring theoretical approaches across disciplines, my work of creative biography illuminates the practice of life writing at their confluence. Adherence to the research and referencing protocols of historiography combined with the techniques of fiction writing in the creative work illustrates the diverse and imaginative truths possible in life writing. This accompanying exegesis explicates and challenges established genre conventions of referentiality and the separation of author and narrator in differentiating biography from fiction and articulates stylistic decisions made in writing this fresh interpretation of Spence.

i. Choosing multiple narrators

You can create competing truths...multi-faceted dimensions

Julia Alvarez 2014, 29.

Unlike most women of her era, Catherine Helen Spence (1825-1910) was not hidden by history but left a significant collection of primary documents from which her life can be reimagined. Her work in the public sphere and her disruption of social mores through her writing drew comment and criticism from both within her extended family and in the conservative community of her hometown, Adelaide. As I read more about Spence, I became aware that most sources, including her autobiography, completed posthumously, were the mediated impressions of others offering different perspectives. The unpublished memoir by her niece, Lucy Spence Morice (1938), presented a character assessment and emphasis on life events that varied from the hagiographic biography by Spence's political colleague, Jeanne Young (1937), who also completed Spence's autobiography (1910). Significant activities in Spence's life – establishing the Cooperative Clothing Company (1910, 94) and the Kindergarten Union (1910, 98) – were given little attention in Young's work, and Lucy Morice, who worked with Spence in these ventures, was barely mentioned. Jones (1987; 1988) and Magarey et al. (2005, 4, 213) drew my attention to the dispute over Spence's literary legacy, including her diaries, and who

should complete her autobiography, which were indicative of earlier tensions. Morice's memoir, because of its frank character assessments of family relationships and others in Spence's life, became a 'spine source' – a referential document with historical legitimacy which functions as comparison with other sources (Lindsey 2018, 6) – for my creative work. How Spence was remembered depended on who was telling her story. This ignited my idea of writing her life from multiple perspectives.

Spence's archival collections, in the State Library of South Australia and the Mitchell Library, Sydney, revealed conflicting expectations among her 'relational others'. Lucy Morice grew up with opposing role models – her outspoken and independent 'Auntie Kate' and her mother who believed it was not 'nice' for women to speak in public forums (*Mail* 24 July 1943, 11). Lucy enjoyed financial and intellectual independence but still judged other women by traditional standards, writing about Jeanne Young: 'the home and the children were neglected and the husband led a sorry time' (Morice 1938, 3). Lucy is the character with whom I most closely identified and I have ventriloquised my mother's concerns about having an outspoken daughter whose independent ideas would deter suitable marriage offers – I grew up in the 1960s. Ellen Gregory, Spence's companion, epitomises the narrow and financially dependent life of nineteenth-century 'spinsters' without private income. She carried the domestic load, including care of three separate families for whom Spence became official guardian. John Finlayson recognised Spence's intellectual prowess and offered her employment on his newspaper despite her gender but had difficulty reconciling her with his idea of womanhood. It is these divergent points of view on Spence's disruption of the accepted female role which my creative biography seeks to explore, by narrating her life from several perspectives, not only to offer a nuanced portrayal of her complex and often conflicted life but also to highlight how those conflicts still resonate with women today.

ii. Interrogating the archives

In recounting details of everyday life, the minutiae and the mundane, the truth of this life document is being interwoven
Maria Tamboukou 2010, 174.

Authors of biographical novels can engage in the same level of research, often using the same sources, as traditional biographers and historians. The difference is in their methodology and interpretation of the documents (Brien 2015, 4; Scaparo 2005, 75). Slotkin claims:

A novel can be as accurate as a history in telling what happened, when and how. It can, and should, be based on careful research and rigorous analysis of evidence. But the distinction and advantage of the fictional form lies in the way it uses evidence and represents conclusions (2005, par. 1).

Authors of speculative biographies can develop a close connection to their subjects which prompts them to intensive research involving consulting other biographies and histories and revisiting documentary evidence more imaginatively than traditional biographers. According to Schabert, ‘They go back to the evidence, sift it anew, dwell on it ... thus sometimes discover facts that have escaped the scholars’ (1990, 23). Anna Funder describes how she read seven previous male biographers’ interpretations of George Orwell then ‘went to their sources and found other facts and other people – those that had been left out’ (2023, 20) to recover the life of Orwell’s wife Eileen, explaining ‘I trained myself to read under the passive voice and omissions’ (2023, 335). Tamboukou observes that personal and political stories are embedded in documents that draw on lived experiences and call for careful reading (2017b, 5). She describes her archival research process as ‘paying attention to unimportant details, trying to discern unheard voices’ (2003, 4). Lindsey similarly advises biographers to be aware of overlaps and contradictions as well as gaps in documentation: ‘A careful examination of the existing sources, however sparse or abundant, is likely to reveal reoccurring clues that can be used to shape how we image and construct our subjects’ (2018, 1). She explains how, in *Wild Love*, she supplemented archival sources with ‘careful contextualisation’ and imagination (2023, xiv). Sources can be fragmented, incomplete and biased yet capable of revealing opinions on and emotional responses to events of their time. In my reading of Spence’s documents, I looked for references to her ‘relational others’ and wondered how they would have responded. I imagined them recounting their memories of Spence almost three decades after her death, in the style of an oral history interview.

Digitisation of newspaper archives through the [National Library of Australia Trove](#) project has made Spence’s journalism more accessible to researchers. However, her newspaper work has received far less attention than her novels although it demonstrates a more developed observation and subject range. Thomson, who produced an anthology of Spence’s work and edited two of her novels printed in the twentieth century, points out that at the end of her life, Spence had earned recognition for her social campaigns through the press:

By then her fictional works ... must have been almost forgotten. Seventy years later it is her journalism which seems the mere ephemera of history, while her novels, two of which have already gone into modern reprintings, are seen not only as important social documents but as landmarks in the literature of nineteenth-century Australia (Thomson in Spence 1984, Preface, *Handfasted*, ix).

In part, this descent into obscurity can be explained by the short-lived nature of the newspaper medium. However, all Spence's literary work has faded from view in the twenty-first century.

Under the scrutiny of post-colonial thinking, Spence's celebration of British settlement at the expense of First Nations people and their culture has overshadowed her powerful social observations of the conflicts and changes to the female role in a 'transplanted' society. In re-imagining Spence's life, I have foregrounded her perceptions of gender inequality in marriage, employment and in particular domestic violence. Her novels provided me with a valuable context of Adelaide society and domestic life at that time. As Barber advocates, construction of background and characterisation in biographical fiction can be enhanced by close reading of the subject's own literary work (2010, 170). While Spence's 'racial blindness' was difficult to explain to contemporary readers, her feminist activism has enduring relevance.

Magarey's biography *Unbridling the Tongues of Women* (2010 [1985]), together with Magarey et al. *Ever Yours C H Spence* (2005), a republished and annotated version of Spence's autobiography and correspondence, provide a foundation for my creative work. Spence's extant letters gave me insight into the Spence household as she relays news and some criticisms of her family circle as well as her public activities (Spence to Scott 1893-1913; Spence to Henry 1900-1910). From these I have recovered the voices of others in Spence's life to explore its many facets and the competition and conflict between those close to her. While I have engaged with the same primary sources as Magarey, I have revisited these with close attention to the echoes of relational others in Spence's life. The voices of her extended family and friends such as Rose Scott and Alice Henry resonate in the letters Spence wrote to them and provide fresh perspectives.

Personal documents such as letters, diaries and notebooks, most often kept by women, can reveal 'micro' views of historical events from a personal point of view, or a

number of points of view. Tamboukou points out that all research projects create new archival collections by bringing together documents from diverse sources and giving them a new life (2017b, 6). She also maintains that a document should be considered in the context of its creation, its genealogy: ‘In working with stories as multiplicities, I am obviously not interested in capturing *the truth* about [the subject’s] life or even recording her as an historical subject. My task as a genealogist is to excavate layers of *regimes of truth* in the construction of stories’ (2008, par. 13). This analogy of uncovering layers of meaning informed my reading of Spence’s archive: her speech notes, her draft newspaper articles and especially her epistolary corpus.

Archival collections provide a reflection of the times in which they were compiled, where, Tamboukou notes, absences of information can be as instructive as that which is preserved (2014, 619). Similarly, Anna Haebich observes: ‘There are the multitude of gaps and silences in the archives that cover over secrets and lies or that indicate information omitted deliberately or simply overlooked ... leaving room for informed imaginative interpretation and reconstructions’ (2015, 5). Haebich suggests that these lacunae can encourage subjective responses, multiple viewpoints and ambiguity in their interpretation (5). Griffiths explains that silence and uncertainty in archival material provide historians with creative opportunity (2009, 74.8). However, he cautions that ‘imagination must work in creative friction with a given world, there are rules as well as freedoms, there are hard edges of reality one must respect’ (2009, 74.8). The freedoms and constraints of creative research and interpretation have been extensively discussed by Mantel (2017), Lindsey (2018), Stocker (2019) and others. I have tried to respect these ‘hard edges of reality’ and resist judging nineteenth-century behaviour through the lens of the twenty-first century.

iii. Letters and diaries

Letters are the great fixative of experience
Janet Malcolm 1994, 110.

Although Spence’s diaries, which provided the basis for her autobiography (1910), have been destroyed, except one for 1894 (SLSA PRG1398/2), a significant corpus of her letters to Rose Scott, Alice Henry and her extended family is extant. In interpreting these and including excerpts from them in writing Spence’s life, I am mindful of both the mediated nature of personal correspondence as explained by Tamboukou (2017a, par. 18) and its power as an intertextual device as highlighted by Malcolm (1994, 110). From

these letters I have extrapolated the recipients' interpretations and reactions. Erla Halldorsdottir points out that the purpose of letter writing is more than exchanging facts. Letters maintain relationships with 'significant others' and reinforce self-understanding and identity (2010, 43).

Personal documents like letters and diaries play an important role in researching and writing a life, often capturing experiences across class and gender. Denning describes such documents as 'texts of lived experience' whose significance is visible through imagination (1998, 208). Letters are a record of everyday life written in the present with no foreknowledge of the future, unlike the retrospective narrative of autobiography (Tamboukou 2017a, par. 16). They can provide multiple perspectives on the same event, recount the comments and conversations of others and reveal multiple layers of meaning (2017a, par. 16). Tamboukou draws attention to the significance of what is left unsaid in letters and lacunae in an epistolary corpus: 'They are full of silences, secrets and gaps. They are stories that respond to the world rather than represent it' (2017a, par. 19). I read Spence's letters with attention to details about her relational others: who was mentioned, who was left out, when and possibly why? Halldorsdottir asserts that lacunae in correspondence, either because of lost sources – as in letters received by Spence but not preserved – or intentional silences – those people and events Spence omitted from her correspondence – can inform a narrative (2010, 38). Spence's epistolary corpus, although mostly from the last two decades of her long life, provides a window into her family and friendships and their competing demands. As Tamboukou observes, letters capture communication between women and significant others in their lives, providing documentation of relationships and multiple perspectives on life events (2010, 175).

Letters, or fragments thereof, are a common intertextual device in both traditional and speculative biography, and also in works of fiction. Funder based *Wifedom: Mrs Orwell's Invisible Life* (2023), her imaginative biography or 'counterfiction' of Eileen O'Shaughnessy, on six previously unpublished letters, using intertextual quotations from the letters blended with biographical information and fictional scenes. Parini includes letters from members of Tolstoy's household in *The Last Station* (2007a); Kathy O'Shaughnessy (2020) includes correspondence and diary entries in *In Love with George Eliot*. Malcolm notes in writing the life of Sylvia Plath that: 'Letters are a great fixative of experience ... They are the biographer's only conduit to unmediated experience ... only when he [sic] quotes from the letters does he share with his readers a sense of life

retrieved' (1994, 110). While letters represent a window into the life of the writer, I would argue that they are not always unmediated communication but that the author is mindful of the recipient's reaction, unlike a diary which is usually written for the author's own record. Diana Barnes explains that letters between women foster a dialogue about the role of women in society and serve to create a female community (2015, 570, 580). This is the case with Spence's epistolary corpus which provides significant background on not only Spence's political activities but also her social networks. Spence's letters to her female friends are rich with personal details and comments on mutual acquaintance: 'Mrs Birks is in bed but hopes to be better soon – I think it is the climactic with her – the time of life which tries many women severely' (Spence to Henry, 24 June 1903). Her autobiography, however, is a mediated account of how Spence wished to be remembered. Because the text was completed after her death by her colleague Jeanne Young, it is uncertain whether the authorial choices are those of Spence or her 'ghost' writer.

Intertextual insertions of letters, diary excerpts and similar materials can provide direct access to alternate points of view, explains Bakhtin: 'All these genres ... bring their own languages, and therefore stratify the linguistic unity of the novel and further intensify its speech diversity in fresh ways' (1981, 321). I suggest that in speculative and traditional biographies, the same effect applies and indeed is more powerful when it is portraying real people. I have included excerpts from Spence's letters in my creative work but interpreted them against the grain to narrate from the point of view of the recipients: Rose Scott and Spence's extended family. Where one side of a correspondence is missing, Halldorsdottir observes the 'thoughts and feelings [of the recipient] are therefore only found as an echo in the letters of others who either write about her or to her' (2010, 42). This applies to Spence's relational others, although the letters Spence wrote provide a valuable insight into her domestic and public life and relationships. Halldorsdottir explains how imaginative reconstruction of the answering letters, requiring diligent research, provides an understanding of both parties (2010, 47). While the reactions of the recipients of Spence's letters are by necessity imagined, excerpts from these letters help situate the narrative in its timeframe and give the reader direct access to Spence's voice.

Quotes from personal or historical documents can reinforce a sense of authenticity by their reference to real-world characters and events (Novak 2017b, 225). Letters and diaries, whether real or fictional, not only contextualise life writing in a period but can

also highlight the incomplete nature of accounts of the past. ‘Conflicting viewpoints are invoked in diaries, letters and other addressed accounts to emphasise that traces of the past are fragmentary, incomplete and contradictory,’ suggests Kym Brindle (2010, 42). She sees this as an opportunity to investigate ‘unresolved contradictions’ through multi-voiced representations (2010, 24), which I have also explored in writing Spence’s life. I have used direct quotes from Spence’s published work and letters together with extracts from Young and Morice’s memoirs of Spence, often in consecutive chapters, to highlight different perspectives on Spence’s activities and motivations.

Diaries traditionally are associated with the confessional female voice (Brindle 2010, 35). The content of Spence’s missing diaries hovers like a question mark over my writing of her life and also the work of previous biographers. Extensive investigations by Magarey et al. (2005, 214) and Jones (1988, 165-166) concluded that the diaries had been destroyed some time after 1937 by either Jeanne Young or her associates. Spence’s only surviving diary (1894, SLSA PRG1398/2) contains brief entries cataloguing daily events and encounters together with longer narratives recording impressions of people she had met. It includes some reported conversations, reflections on her public lectures, reading matter and letter writing. The everyday remarks about losing her spectacles or washing her hair and asides such as ‘I coughed a good deal but Mrs Maule had sent me a little bottle of Powells’ Balsam of Anniseed (sic) and I took a dose which kept me quiet at night ...’ (Spence 1894, 19 June) are precious detail for my creative biography.

Jeanne Young stated that ‘the diaries were too private for any eyes but hers’ (Magarey et al. 2005, 214; Morice to Franklin, 7 September 1937). Magarey speculates it was not any personal information about Spence that made Young resist handing over the diaries, but rather Spence’s criticism of Young’s marital relationship. She cites this extract from correspondence by Spence to Alice Henry:

She has a life of such slavery, unappreciated by her husband – His monstrous egoism is comic, if it were not so tragic – I hope that her children will repay her for he never will – it would make it worse if I quarrelled with him – and there are sides of his character – intellectual – that appeal to me – But his sublime unconsciousness of the daily, hourly labours of his wife – His idea that all she knows and all she is able for is due to his teaching – and that it is a privilege for her to exist as his wife

and the mother of his children – his requiring him to help her with his newspaper work...as well as do everything for the household would be called untrue and overdrawn if it were introduced into fiction – like Dickens he is all nerves – and like Dickens he has no patience with the nerves of his wife (Spence to Henry, 22 November 1907).

Spence's letters to Alice Henry and Rose Scott are chatty and frank. Outspoken comments about the health and emotions of those close to her in letters to a third party indicate that Spence's diaries, as unmediated reflections, would have been equally or even more explicit. Following Cavarero's observation on the narrative characteristic of female friendships (2000, 74), I have used extracts from Spence's epistolary corpus to reimagine her conversations.

Tamboukou's analysis of the content and form of diaries describes them as a cultural practice at the interface of life and literature, defying genre boundaries. Their temporal timeframe can validate the knowledge they contain (2017a, par. 2). Furthermore, the material aspect of diaries – their wear and tear, ink colour and possibly drawings or memorabilia attached – makes their contribution greater than the written words: 'The diary is therefore not simply a collection of memories or thoughts, a text or an image but a living body, an assemblage of space/time/matter components that keep making connections with the body of the diarist as well as that of its multiple readers' (Tamboukou 2017a, par. 9). Spence's single surviving diary is, Magarey observes: 'a rich and detailed record of her days, her work, her feelings, her conversations and the people she met and spent time with' (Magarey et al. 2005, 215). When I held that simple, cloth-bound book I viscerally experienced the tremendous loss that the destruction of its approximately 60 companion volumes had made to our quest for understanding what motivated Spence's tremendous energy.

iv. Dialogue

The past was speaking and the present was listening

Christopher Kremmer 2015, 4.

Catherine Spence lived before recording devices. Indications of how she and her circle may have spoken, the conversations they might have had, come from her letters. Works of fiction, both Spence's own novels and those of her contemporaries, such as George

Eliot, William Thackeray, Charles Dickens and the Brontë sisters, provide a supplementary source. We look to fiction for cultural reference because, at its best, it endeavours to record the everyday, the character details and minutiae of life absent from non-fiction accounts (Barber 2010, 166-167).

Reimagining conversations between people from the past is problematic for writers and even more difficult for historians. Grenville's musing on the challenge of creating dialogue for characters from the nineteenth century in *The Secret River* (2006a; 2006b, 202), prompted Inga Clendinnen to reflect that:

Historians can't do conversations at all ... They can sometimes make monologues out of formal speeches or secret diaries or confessional statements. But the informal, verbal interactions of daily life? No. They are lost to us ... Simulation of appropriate speech styles is an enduring problem for novelists. It is not a problem for historians because either they are using their own ordinary language, or quoting directly from contemporary documents (2006, 18).

Dialogue is regarded by some narratologists as a demarcation between fiction and non-fiction. Cohn considers 'utterance' as one of the signposts of fictionality in narrative (1990, 778). However, Novak points out that creative non-fiction relies heavily on the imaginative creation of dialogue (2017a, 9). Brien uses the term 'literary ventriloquism' for the way readers perceive voices from the past in imagined dialogue, which she indicates is a feature of both fiction and biography (2014, 8).

Life writing genres at the confluence of fiction and history present a challenge in reconstructing credible dialogue. Authors such as Grenville (2006b, 201-206) and Padmore (2017, par. 14) discuss their problems in creating a suitable conversational style for their characters. Padmore concludes: '[Speech] is an aspect of the past that cannot be retrieved,' explaining her decision to choose plausible 'authenticity effect' over historical accuracy in dialogue (2017, pars 15, 18). Grenville similarly opted for a 'scattering' of idioms from the past: 'My job as a novelist wasn't to reconstruct the authentic sound of nineteenth-century vernacular. My job was to produce something that *sounded* authentic' (2006b, 206). 'Authenticity is a negotiation between the evidence available to the writer, the reader's existing understanding of the period and the imaginative power of the author, which combined, can only present the spirit of an era, rather than its actuality,' claims

Bryony Stocker (2012, 310). Roland Barthes describes the process of striving for authenticity as the ‘reality effect’ whereby insignificant details, along with ‘auditive’ history – ‘it is speech which in a sense moulded history’ – are used to anchor a narrative in its period (1986, 148, 150).

Two of Spence’s ‘relational others’ have left written recollections of her. Jeanne Young’s 1937 tribute provides some approximation of Spence’s conversations. Lucy Morice’s brief memoir contains an echo of her aunt’s voice (1938). Others, particularly Rose Scott (ML Vol. 19, A2278), have kept her letters, which reflect Spence’s daily life and personal interactions as well as current events. Spence described John Finlayson in her autobiography (1910, 55). His lengthy obituary (*Observer*, Adelaide, 3 April 1915) and the history of *The Register* newspaper (<https://www.samemory.sa.gov.au> 2021) further inform my portrayal of him. I have modelled his benign sexism on an editor I worked with as a cadet journalist in the 1970s. Ellen Gregory, Spence’s ‘lady’s companion’ gave evidence at the inquest into the suicide of Spence’s ward, Kitty Hood, providing the only glimpse into her style of expression (Police Reports to the Coroner 1904). I have looked to characters from Spence’s novels to illustrate the indeterminate nature of Ellen Gregory’s position within the Spence household and her possible vernacular, together with other women’s records of the period: Frost 1995 [1840-1883]; Henning 1969 [1854-1866]; Meredith 1973 [1839-1844]) and contemporaneous newspaper articles.

Each character’s speech displays its own belief system, thus introducing social heteroglossia through dialogue and intertextual inclusions:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel, *is another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express ... the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such a discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions ... A potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages (Bakhtin 1981, 324).

In my portrayal of Spence through the narrative voices of her ‘relational others’, Spence herself appears only as reflected through these narrators. The fragments of her letters and

newspaper articles, which are intertextual inclusions, are the reader's only direct access to Spence's voice but their intimate style has a conversational tone.

Verisimilitude in dialogue can signify the author's understanding of an historical period, claims Stocker (2012, 308). She has examined various strategies employed by historical novelists to present conversations evocative of their time. Historians [and historical novelists] use documents such as letters and diaries as a substitute for recorded speech and the formal language as representing everyday speech, which can be misleading (Stocker 2012, 310). However, Lindsey has quoted verbatim from historical documents in *Wild Love*, explaining how she 'occasionally altered published writing, letters and other sources ... to suit the conversational medium' (2023, xiv). This is the strategy I have followed by taking direct quotations from Spence's letters and newspaper articles and replaying them as conversations with her family and colleagues, recognising that this technique is a compromise between historical accuracy and authenticity of conversational speech patterns.

Imagined dialogue as a creative technique can display a character's internal discourse and emotions, and also serve to represent a broader ethical or philosophical position, according to Bakhtin:

We attempt to guess, to imagine, how a person with authority might conduct himself in the given circumstances, the light he would cast upon them with his discourse. In such experimental guesswork the image of the speaking person and his discourse become the object of creative, artistic imagination (1981, 347).

He asserts that the dialogue invented for a character encompasses their interior perspectives, their social and emotional contexts. Meaning is 'orchestrated' by including this speech diversity (Bakhtin 1981, 371).

Immersion in the syntax and vocabulary of a past era is a method Stocker advocates to simulate language of historical characters, but this is most applicable to events and people within living memory and when sound recording was available. She cautions that terms must be familiar to the modern reader, or a glossary provided (Stocker 2012, 312, 315). A hybrid approach using modern grammar and phrasing, combined with words and idioms that signal a time past, places dialogue in an historical framework. For this, Stocker appropriates the term 'bygonese' from David Mitchell (Stocker 2012, 313). This,

she points out, is the technique used by Mantel in the Cromwell trilogy. Authors need to do sufficient research to ensure the language they use and the objects it describes were current in the time of their narrative (Stocker 2012, 316). The challenge, Stocker concludes, is to create historically plausible dialogue which a modern audience can comprehend (316).

Despite the pitfalls in writing dialogue evocative of a time past, Lackey claims that readers expect dialogue to echo how people spoke in the era being depicted (2014, 6). Dialogue can provide opportunities for character building and revelation, as Lee Gutkind explains: ‘By recording conversation, the creative non-fiction writer captures reality. This is how people communicate in real life ... As in fiction writing, dialogue enhances action and characterisation, while eliciting reader reaction through humour or tragedy’ (1997, 23). Reimagined conversations between Spence and her relational others are significant in my creative biography. Where possible, following the style of Parini (2007a [1990], 371), I have taken lines from Spence’s novels and letters. For women like Ellen Gregory, who left a scant imprint on the archive, invented dialogue inspired by similar characters in Spence’s novels provides a means of recovering voices lost to history (Stocker 2012, 309; Scaparo 2005, 90). In close reading of Spence’s archive, I looked for conflicting opinions and personal observations from others in her life to recover different voices.

Bakhtin stresses that language is not unified but contains diverse speech types signifying different social classes, generations and ethnicities:

The novel orchestrates all its themes ... by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speech of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel. Each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices (1981, 263).

Bakhtin’s principle is valuable in both interpreting archival documents and reimagining dialogue from the past. In recovering the voices of Spence’s relational others, I have been mindful of how their speech and vocabulary might have been influenced by age, gender and social standing.

v. Life writing in the first-person

The reader of non-fiction understands that its narrator is ... the author named on its title page – Dorrit Cohn, 1990, 792.

The first-person narrator is a defining feature of autobiography and memoir, as is the objective third-person narrator of biography, and both categorise the work as non-fiction – the reader expects the narrator to be the author named on the cover. First-person narration is, however, also a popular technique of fiction and creative non-fiction, where the narrator can be a created character ‘into which the author has transformed himself’ (Cohn 1990, 792). Cohn argues that the separation of author and narrator in fictional texts is ‘a decisive signal for the reader’s recognition of their novelistic status’ (793). James Phelan agrees, pointing out that in nonfiction we assume that ‘the narrating “I” is a reliable spokesperson for [the author]’ (2009, 15). My creative biography of Catherine Spence queries this definition by using the imagined voices of real people who have lived in the past to interpret Spence’s literary and archival record. The ironic title ‘I knew Miss Spence’ and the implicit contradictions in each narrator’s account underscore their different perceptions of events.

This multi-voiced depiction of Spence mimics the style of collaborative biography where, as Sidonie Smith points out, the narrators create their own characters as subjects (1993, 398):

The collaborative subject is simultaneously individualised and historicised, and the single voice of the individual is held in tension with the multiple voices of history. The role of controlling author is relinquished and the control and authority of the ‘I’ called into question; thus both author and subject are decentred. Since meaning is not unified but multiple [such texts] force us to ‘know’ the subject in multiple ways as well (1993, 400).

Smith explains that multiplication of narrators distinguishes collaborative life writing from traditional biographies and autobiographies. She describes how collaborative works can employ first-person narratives to link and interpret archival materials within a multi-voiced account to situate their subjects in a cultural and historical context (1993, 400). Bancroft describes how authors intertwine fragments from different perspectives: ‘If we only read a single narrator’s contributions, we’d miss much of the plot, which readers can fill in based on information shared by the other narrators’ (2018, 269). This technique

offers different interpretations of past events. Furthermore, it emphasises the variable and fragmented nature of memory which is pertinent in interpreting Spence's archives.

Narration in the first-person can convey a sense of verisimilitude even when the work is clearly understood as fiction. Schabert describes this as an 'illusion of authenticity' (1990, 93). Writing past lives in the first-person, from one or more perspectives, is utilised frequently by novelists but rarely by biographers. Kiera Lindsey's *Wild Love* (2023), a biography narrated in the first-person voices of Adelaide Ironside and her mother, subverts expectations of the nominal author as narrator. Andrew Motion's *Wainewright the Poisoner* (2000), which presents Wainewright's 'autobiography' in the first-person but 150 years after his death, is a similar exception. Extensive footnotes and intertextual non-fiction insertions further confound readers by giving the biographical subject an 'invented voice' (Novak 2017a,19; Brien 2014, 6). Eakin describes the first-person narrator as 'assuming the burden of history' – being identified with and taking responsibility for narrating events of their time (2019, 97), which is a role I have created for Spence's relational others. Because eyewitness accounts are variable and memory fragmented, Burke maintains that by writing in the first-person, 'the fictional device of the "unreliable first-person narrator"' can be effectively used by the historian to demonstrate that his/her voice and interpretation is merely one among several (1991, 239). Alvarez uses first-person for one sister, third-person for two others and a diary for the fourth in her multi-narrator novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2019). Like Lindsey's Ironside, Motion's Wainewright and Alvarez' Mirabel sisters, I have invented voices for Spence's relational others as narrators. I sought to capture a sense of verisimilitude, or imagined authenticity, by using first-person narration together with intertextual letters and other writings from Spence herself, but her inner self is only revealed through her relational others.

Life writing from a point of view of other than the subject can be interpreted as an inversion of biographic practice, explains Cavarero (2000, 81). She gives the example of Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* ([1933] 1990) where Stein's own autobiography is reflected through her partner, Toklas. Cavarero describes this as 'disguising autobiography – writing in the first-person instead of the third-person' (2000, 81). In writing Spence's life, I have added a further layer to this inversion by projecting voices onto Spence's relational others to reflect her story. In my retelling of Spence's life, the personalities and opinions of others close to her act as interpreters of the

complex and contested aspects of Spence's long and varied public career. Women telling their own stories mimic female behaviour in everyday conversations, according to Cavarero (2000, 54). It is this aspect of 'across the kitchen table' dialogue among and about others that I have sought to emulate in writing Spence's life.

Like other examples at the confluence of history and fiction, my imagined voices of Spence's relational others are based on referential evidence. For instance, Atwood uses the first-person voice of Grace Marks to recount her own story in *Alias Grace* in the style of a witness giving evidence, echoing the trial documents which informed the novel (1998, 1515). Parini's multiple narrators in *The Last Station*, drawn from several diaries of those close to Tolstoy, speak in the first-person to give often conflicting perspectives of events (2017 [1997], 301). My work on Spence is strongly influenced by Parini, drawing on documented records where available and embedding archival evidence in fictional techniques such as invented dialogue. Like Tolstoy in *The Last Station*, Spence's own voice is reflected through her letters and conversations with others. This technique rendered Spence's inner voice inaccessible to me. Her thoughts and emotions only became apparent through the interpretations of others.

vi. Paratexts

a means of establishing an understanding between the text and its reader

Gerard Genette 1997, xi.

Readers bring different expectations to a work they recognise as fiction rather than non-fiction and derive different meanings from it. When engaging with fictional work, they focus inwardly, becoming absorbed in the world of the text, whereas with non-fiction, their focus is regularly directed to referential connections outside the text (Heyne 2001, 327; Lehman 1997, 3). A number of publishing conventions, outside the text itself, signal the fictional status of a work to its reader. These paratexts can take the form of disclaimers, author notes, references or, simplest of all, a cover statement that the work is a novel. 'If you call it a novel on the cover or the title page, that ... implies a contract with the reader,' asserts Russell Banks (2014, 50).

Most imaginative life writing carries a disclaimer of its fictionality. James Vicars (2016a, pars 9, 14) suggests that this practice diminishes the potential for biographical appreciation of works that incorporate imaginative incursions where knowledge is fragmented or uncertain. He cites numerous examples where, despite using fictional

means to recover a life, texts have been classified as biography (Vicars 2016a, pars 12, 13). Lodge in the disclaimer to *Author, Author*, his biographical novel on Henry James, critiques publishing conventions by stating:

Sometimes it seems advisable to preface a novel with a note saying that the story and the characters are entirely fictitious, or words to that effect. On this occasion a different authorial statement seems called for. Nearly everything that happens in this book is based on factual sources. With one insignificant exception, all the named characters were real people. Quotations from their books, plays, articles, letters, journals etc., are their own words. But I have used a novelist's licence in representing what they thought, felt and said to each other; and I have imagined some events and personal details which history has omitted to record. So this book is a novel, and structured like a novel (Lodge 2004, *frontmatter*).

Lodge's statement informs my own treatment of Spence's life story where I have consciously and deliberately situated the narrative at the confluence of factual biography and fiction by portraying real characters who lived in the past and quoting from archival documents, while reimagining their conversations, thoughts and emotions. Gerard Genette observes that genre indications in a book title or disclaimer are not a defining position but an indication of how the reader should approach the narrative (1997, 95).

Non-fiction works are recognisable by their referentiality, lending them authority as a record that can be revisited and verified. Layne accords the same referential status to biofiction which provides reference notes and/or bibliography as a 'source of facts that can be verified by other people' (2018b, 19). However, in texts that conflate referential and imaginative material – which Lackey calls 'symbolic truths' (2014, 6) – or present conflicting points of view or recollections, the referential trail is problematic because of its imaginative treatment of documented evidence but it is also important in establishing the 'truth value' of the narrative (Novak 2017a, 6). Genette indicates that reference notes in fictional works can play a corroborative role in establishing statements and drawing attention to supporting documentation (1997, 332): 'The most essential of the paratext's properties is functionality ... to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose' (1997, 407). He describes paratexts as a means of establishing an understanding between the text and its reader (1997, xi). My purpose, in choosing to write Spence's life

in an imaginative, literary style, is to amplify the contradictions in her record and thus challenge readers' expectation of a totalised conclusion (Hutcheon 1988, 227).

Cohn (1990), Smith and Watson (2010) and others define signposts between fiction and non-fiction, especially in the genre of imaginative biography where the lives of real people from the past are depicted in novelistic style. Cohn describes three points of demarcation: references; dialogue and introspection; separation of author and narrator. 'History is committed to verifiable documentation and this commitment is suspended in fiction,' she asserts (1990, 779). She maintains that 'the minds of imaginary figures can be known in the way that those of real persons cannot.' Even when the character is based on a real person, past events cannot be recovered through their eyes (1990, 785-6). Either the central character is themselves the perspective through which events are experienced or is observed by another character. Smith and Watson explain that: 'First-person novels continue to signal readers in various ways that they are reading a novel and not an autobiographical narrative. Most obviously, the author's name on the title page differs from the name of the character narrating the tale' (2010, 10-11). This separation of author and narrator distinguishes a work of fiction from non-fiction, according to Cohn's definition (1990, 792).

My project interrogates each of these criteria: references to archival documents are included together with explanatory notes where chronology or context is knowingly altered for narrative emphasis (Chapters III, 5; V, 32, 36; XIII, 16; XIV, 2; XV, 44; XX, 8; XXVIII, 2). Each of the narrators engages in dialogue and introspection, and where the text quotes archival sources they are referenced. Other dialogue is imaginatively constructed from Spence's writing and recollections of Morice and Young. The separation of author and narrator is evidenced by the recreated voices of several narrators. However, I suggest that this technique does not position the work such that it invites a binary fact/fiction definition. This technique does, however, exemplify White's position that there is no single correct view of events, but multiple views each deserving of their own expression (1966, 130).

Numerous examples of crossgenre texts include reference notes yet in other ways resemble fiction. Lindsey has website links to chapter notes and references in the biography *Wild Love* so readers can ascertain 'which parts of the book are factual and which are imagined' (2023, 241). Funder includes extensive endnotes in both the non-

fiction biographical passages and fictional scenes of *Wifedom* (2023). Virginia Woolf includes an index and photographs of her subject in *Orlando*, the fictionalised biography of Vita Sackville-West (2020 [1928]). Drusilla Modjeska includes a list of archival sources in *Poppy* (1990), although she elsewhere acknowledges her reliance on creative imagination and a fictional narrator for this apparent memoir (2015, par. 5). Weaving a personal memoir with historical biofiction, Jessica White footnotes *Hearing Maud* (2019). Although the referencing in these cross-genre works is not always as extensive as that in a history text, it demonstrates the difficulty of using referencing as an indicator of history and of establishing genre boundaries for biofiction. Conversely, historians Greg Denning (*Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, 1992) and Geoffrey Blainey (*The Story of Australia's People Part I*, 2015) omit referencing from their trade publications. By deliberately subverting the anticipated boundary markers between fiction and non-fiction, through the use of reference notes in a text with characteristics of a novel, my creative biography of Spence implicitly defies binary fiction/non-fiction definition. It questions whose memory is correct, while adhering to Schabert's dictum of 'responsible imagination' of what might have been (1990, 147).

I have used [Chicago Manual of Style \(online\)](#) endnote style, modified for multiple newspaper articles (historic newspaper articles often do not include by-lines and headlines are often generic) or several letters written in the same year, together with explanatory notes in the creative text. I chose Chicago referencing because it offered both endnote and in-text styles for the creative work and exegesis respectively. Should 'I knew Miss Spence' be published commercially, I would anticipate the references would be replaced with chapter notes outlining documented sources and creative extrapolation, in the style of *Wifedom: Mrs Orwell's Invisible Life* (Funder 2023) or *The Convict's Daughter* (Lindsey 2016), an increasingly common practice in cross-genre life writing.

Authors of historical novels and biographies frequently include explanatory notes or acknowledgements of their documented sources and imaginative departures from the record. These explanations can allow authors to reflect on the nature of their speculation and imagination:

By basing their subjective conjecture, empathy and imaginings on the documented facts (and making clear where any conjecture is not thus grounded) biographers can speculate but still ensure their texts are

classified as non-fiction biographies. In this way speculation allows biographers to utilise and amalgamate into the resulting narrative, evidence that is fragmentary, ambiguous and contradictory and to relay how uncertain, contradictory and confusing real lives are. It also allows biographers to write reflectively on the nature of the biographic enterprise itself (Brien 2017, 21).

Taking as an example Lindsey's *The Convict's Daughter* (2016), Brien describes how the after-matter sections explain to readers which scenes are factual and which are speculation, describe the background research and identify where imagination was inserted (2017, 20-21). I have similarly signposted my few departures from archival evidence in endnotes, such as the altered chronology for narrative effect in Spence's guardianship of the Duval children (page 27, Chapter III, note 5).

Paratextual prefaces, acknowledgements or author notes help situate a text in its factual landscape. Layne categorises these insertions as: 'Sophisticated rhetorical devices that govern, in important ways, the way readers encounter the text. They are particularly influential over the text's pedagogical function, its reception as fact and/or fiction, and its perceived relationship to the published record' (2018b, 20). Post-modern theory has demonstrated that the relationship between fact and fiction and their connection to the archival record are both complex and contested. Hutcheon emphasises that in endeavouring to understand the past, our focus has shifted from validation to signification, recognising that more than one construction can be made from textual traces:

Representations of the past are selected to signify whatever the historian intends. It is this very difference between events (which have no meaning in themselves) and facts (which are given meaning) that post-modernism obsessively foregrounds. Even documents are selected as a function of a certain problem or point of view. Historiographic metafiction often points to this fact by using the paratextual conventions of historiography (especially footnotes) to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations (Hutcheon 1988, 122).

While 'I knew Miss Spence' is not overtly metafictional in its narrative strategies, the use of footnotes does draw attention to the constructed nature of biographical

writing. Hutcheon explains that narratives can highlight both their referential authority and speculative incursions (1988, 123). ‘Facts’ are determined by the questions we ask, rather than validated against an empirical benchmark. Therefore, borrowing the paratextual referencing conventions of historiography for a work at the confluence of history and fiction can draw attention to the fragmentary and selective nature of archival records and amplify the use of fictive techniques to represent multiple points of view, she explains (1988, 122). My work on Spence demonstrates this theoretical position by referencing where quotations from letters or newspaper articles are adapted as dialogue.

Perhaps the greatest misunderstandings of the delineation between history and fiction arise when history, following the accepted scholarly protocols of referencing and verification, is written in a fictive style. For instance, McKenna, discussing historical novels founded on archival research, cites Thomas Keneally’s *Schindler’s Ark* as an example (2006, 96). However, in his preface Keneally clearly states the non-fiction basis of his work: ‘To use the texture and devices of a novel to tell a true story ... I have attempted to avoid all fiction, though, since fiction would debase the record’ (Keneally 1983, iv). Ricketson similarly recalls students mistaking Funder’s *Stasiland* (2002) for a work of fiction because of its richness of style (2010, par. 1). ‘If a work ... reads *like* a novel, is it likely to be read *as* a novel?’ he asks, ‘that is, as having no stated purpose or attempting to represent actual people and events’ (Ricketson 2010, par. 5). Cohn maintains that within historical novels, even when the subject matter is close to referential narrative, the manner of its telling can be understood as fictional (1990, 788). She claims that a fictionalised narrative masquerading as an historical text is a ‘generic anomaly’ unless its fictional status is announced (Cohn 1990, 788). My creative work on Spence would be a ‘generic anomaly’ by Cohn’s definition, because of its separation of author and narrators, intentionally so because my purposes are to use multiple voices to highlight the conflicting expectations placed upon Spence, and to resonate with women today.

The relationship between history and fiction traditionally has privileged the historical or non-fictional because of its referential base (Wake 2016, 81). However, Paul Wake argues historical fiction can also be ‘demonstrably referential’, at least in part, and thus he contests Cohn’s (1990, 779) distinction between history and fiction in terms of fiction’s freedom from referential definitions. ‘Paratextual materials define the conditions of [readers’] entry into a text,’ explains Wake (2016, 90) who draws on the works of

Genette and Jacques Derrida. Latham applauds the freedom from referential protocols as one of the strengths of biographical fiction: ‘a genre which gives licence to authors to create a complex life, explore the subject’s mind, thought process, blend facts, real details and actual words into fiction, without inserting footnotes which would establish the frontier between facts and fiction’ (2014, 113). This imaginative freedom provides the speculative opportunity to add contextual and emotional details to develop the biographical character of an historical subject (Lindsey 2018, 12). However, as ‘I knew Miss Spence’ demonstrates, references can simultaneously establish and confront our expectations of biography by imaginative extrapolation from archival sources and also by indicating where the narrative has departed from documented chronology or events.

Fiction can include other hallmarks of non-fiction such as maps, photographs or excerpts from previously published works, as Lindsey does in *Wild Love* (2023), highlighting the ambiguity of these paratextual or intertextual insertions. Wake describes this ambiguity as a ‘shared space rather than a linear border’ of fictionality (2016, 91). In this context, paratexts can serve to destabilise rather than define a borderline between history and fiction and biography and biofiction.

Commonly, traditional biographies insert quotations in block text within the narrative with source references – for example in *Unbridling the Tongues of Women*, Magarey’s biography of Spence (2010 [1985]) or *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Judith Allen 1994) – whereas when novels include quoted material it is frequently placed at the beginning of chapters, such as Walter Benjamin’s writings in *Benjamin’s Crossing* (Parini 1998). However, in cross-genre works, practices vary according to authorial intention and stylistic choices. Funder italicises intertextual quotes from letters in *Wifedom* (2023) and distinguishes the fictional scenes through typography. Grenville includes italicised excerpts from Elizabeth Macarthur’s letters in *A Room Made of Leaves* (2020); Julia Alvarez also uses non-fiction quotations intertextually in *In the Time of The Butterflies* (2019). I have followed this hybrid practice to situate my work on Spence towards history writing on a fact/fiction continuum (Keener 2001, 181). I consider that such intertextual interventions amplify heteroglossia in the reimagined voices of Spence’s relational others. Unlike Irving Stone, who insisted that quotations in his biography of Jack London run on a continuing line with the main text so as not to disrupt the reader (2017 [1957], 129), I have italicised intertextual quotations to implicitly query whether this is a work of fiction and included other paratextual material

such as newspaper cuttings and photographs, which provide a referential anchor to time and place.

Memorabilia, photographs and significant objects that contribute to our ‘cultural literacy’ of a past era (Denning 1992, 356) can enhance biographical narratives (Brien 2015, 4). To highlight the real identities of the characters in ‘I knew Miss Spence’, I have included introductory photographs of Spence and her ‘relational others’ (except Ellen Gregory, who left no photographic evidence) and I have used these as a source for physical description and conjectured personality. In addition to tangible, temporal reminders within the narrative, such as mentions of women’s corsets, unpaved streets and horse-drawn trams, Spence’s references to historical events: an outbreak of bubonic plague in Sydney in 1900 (Spence to Scott, 25th April 1900) or the inaugural sitting of Federal parliament in Melbourne (Spence to Henry 6th March 1901), situate the biographical work in its period.

Paratexts can also indicate the author’s anxiety in establishing their adherence to or departure from documented sources (Padmore 2017, par. 17). By explaining the text’s claims to historical truth alongside its fictionality, they pre-empt readers’ doubts but cannot fully address the paradox between the real and imagined (Padmore 2017, par. 18). Lodge, however, points out how paratextual devices can emphasise the research on which a text is based: ‘By guaranteeing the authenticity of written documents [a novelist gives readers] a kind of reality check on the events described’ (2006, 62). For reasons of authentication rather than anxiety, I have referenced my creative biography of Spence, indicating by omission where dialogue, interior monologues and emotions are a product of my imagination. Layne suggests this method implies the veracity of all detail as grounded in evidence (2018b, 20).

vii. Ethical considerations

dilemmas of intersecting lives...unreliable memories

David Carlin, 2009, 2.

The ethical limits in expanding a real-life story by engaging fictional techniques and retelling practices and behaviours is a subject of great complexity, much debated and indicating ongoing research into the multifold responsibilities involved in writing past lives. Griffiths describes those responsibilities as being ‘to the people in our stories, to our sources, to our informants, to our readers and audiences, to the integrity of the past

itself' (2009, 74.9). These categories establish a framework for further discussion, in the scholarship of life writing, of the ethical considerations and constraints of both traditional and speculative biography.

Writing the life of a real person who has lived in the past, and the 'relational others' who are inevitably part of their narrative (Eakin, 2019; Miller, 1994) carries the obligation to represent lives accurately and respectfully, but not necessarily hagiographically. Biographer, Frances Spalding, describes this obligation as the biographer's contract (2011, 39). She explores the constraints in reconciling the private individual with the performative nature of public life, together with illuminating the inner life of the subject (38, 39). In comparing a traditional biography to film biopics or fictionalised biographies, she comments: 'A biography is differently analysed, its truths scrutinised over time and checked by many interested parties' (41). David Carlin, writing creative non-fiction, where 'history, memory and fantasy intersect', stresses the need to clarify when speculation is used to bridge gaps in the archival record (2009, 4). He states: 'My responsibility is to represent the truth of this very impossibility of a singular "truthful" representation' (4). In my treatment of Spence, I have addressed similar contradictory evidence by using multiple narrators, each drawing on referential evidence, to present nuanced differences in the depiction of her character.

Debates over the ethics of the degree of acceptable speculation in recovering a past life are ongoing and predate post-modernism and post-structuralism. Lytton Strachey introduced fictive techniques to traditional biography in the early twentieth century – a style that privileged authorial creativity over objectivity, stating his purpose as 'to illustrate rather than explain' (2017 [1918], 76) and paving the way for biographical novels. While discussion on the definitions and genre classifications of biographical fiction proliferate, the ethical considerations of recovering, amplifying or even falsifying the life stories of people who have once lived require closer scrutiny.

All biography involves speculation to some degree, through processes of selection, interpretation and extrapolation of material (Brien 2015, 3; Kremmer, 2015, 2). As discussed above, should 'I knew Miss Spence' be published commercially, without the benefit of formal referencing and this exegesis, an explanatory author note or chapter notes would be required to delineate its imaginative incursions. The demarcation between fiction and non-fiction is blurred. However, when works of deliberate fiction are

promoted as factual an ethical line is breached. Examples such as *The Hand that Signed the Paper* by Helen Demidenko (Darville) (1994) call out authorial responsibility to historical truth (Griffiths 2015, 12). Referencing documented sources is a key indicator of non-fiction writing, and an established protocol of historiography; however, it is not an infallible benchmark. ‘To cite a source does not necessarily endorse its veracity,’ explains Kremmer (2015, 7). Archival documents are not always accurate and are strongly influenced by prevailing power structures at the time of their collection (Haebich 2015, 6). Where competing versions exist or where subordinated genders and races are overlooked, imaginative reconstruction is the only way those voices can be recovered. Responsibility to one’s sources, therefore, is not unqualified. In common with many contemporary authors of history, fiction and the contested space between genres, my challenge was situating Spence’s life story in the zeitgeist of nineteenth-century society, recognising its differences in attitude to colonisation, relations with First Nations peoples, social class and gender roles. I have looked to the imagined voices of Spence’s relational others to explore her behaviour and provide a window into the past, following Hutcheon’s precept that postmodernism ‘rejects projecting present beliefs and standards onto the past’ because of our limited capacity to know the past through its archival traces (1988, 122).

Many works of biographical fiction are informed by earlier traditional biographies. Parini acknowledges Tolstoy’s many biographers in *The Last Station* (2007a [1990], 372); Lodge cites Henry James’ biographers in *Author, Author* (2004, 385); Kathy O’Shaughnessy explains in her author note to *In Love with George Eliot* ‘this is a book heavily indebted to other books’ (2020, 383). Critics of biographical novels sometimes accuse their authors of merely paraphrasing and reimagining previous biographies of the subject (Lackey 2017a, 194). Acknowledging previous scholarship is not only an academic requirement, it is an act of courtesy. I was fortunate to meet Catherine Spence’s biographer, Susan Magarey, and discuss my project with her. Both her biography of Spence, *Unbridling the Tongues of Women* (2010 [1985]), and Spence’s autobiography (1910) have underpinned my project.

An author’s responsibility to a reading audience is frequently described as a contract (Lehman 1997, 2; Spalding 2011, 39; Lackey 2017a, 10). This perceived contract relies on the assumption that the reader has clear signals to guide their responses to whether they are reading ‘true’ (referential) or fictional texts (Lehman 1997, 21;

Heyne 2001, 330; Novak 2017a, 12). Latham (2014, 116) proposes that readers can engage with some texts, especially those on the interface of history and fiction, on either or both levels. Novak cites examples where experimental life writing can undermine reader expectations of classification (2017a, 13). This is a practice I seek to emulate by combining fictive techniques with referential protocols and non-fiction excerpts. By using multiple narrators, I contest binary expectations of fact/fiction, highlighting the multiplicity of possible interpretations by avoiding totalisation. Heyne suggests that readers can recognise a text as non-fiction by its competing versions of events (2001, 330): ‘When we can talk about different stories competing, and genuinely wish to choose between them ... then we have left the realm of fiction.’ Both Heyne and Lehman (1997, 183) stress that readers’ caring whether the text is ‘true’ is an indicator that they are engaging with it as non-fiction.

viii Interpreting Spence for a contemporary audience

Bridges into history for the reader

Gillian Polack, 2014, 529.

Spence recorded in her autobiography that ‘I have lived through a glorious age of progress ... I have seen the evolution of South Australia from a province to an important State in a great Commonwealth’ (1910, 101) and ventriloquised through her protagonist in *A Week in the Future* that ‘the language, the literature, the history and the traditions of England are among my most treasured possessions’ (Spence 1987 [1889], 24). These sentiments do not resonate comfortably with twenty-first century readers conscious of Australia’s striving for an independent national identity and coming to terms with the violence of our colonial past. I searched for, and found, references to Spence’s developing awareness of First Nations’ culture and their discriminatory treatment by colonists that have not previously been explored. However, her concern for Aboriginal people remained peripheral to her work for abandoned (white) children and for electoral reform. Her admiration for British literature and culture eclipsed her awareness of the darker aspects of colonialism.

Post-colonial critics of Spence’s fiction, Janette Hancock (2003) and Margaret Allen (2001), have pointed to the absence of First Nations characters or culture in her novels. However, in defence of Hancock’s criticism that ‘Spence never featured colonial

oppression or frontier violence within her narratives' (2003, 42), I propose that this was because her novels and newspaper articles concerned primarily urban and domestic topics familiar to her. With the exception of *Gathered In* (1977 [1881-1882 serialised in *Observer*]), her characters make only brief excursions outside the city boundary.

In the context of Spence's life in colonial Adelaide, the dispossession of Aboriginal people is notable in the narrative through its absence, indicating her blindness to the issue of racial inequality. 'Australian feminists saw their duty in the colonies as upholding the white race, reforming masculinist behaviour, and thereby protecting both white and Indigenous women and girls from masculine excess,' observes Kate Darian-Smith in her exploration of feminism in the late nineteenth century (2007, 156). Fictional representations of the colonial frontier can work both within and against dominant ideologies to demonstrate their inconsistencies, argues Susan Sheridan (2012, 250). She cites the 1890 novel *An Australian Girl* by Catherine Martin as an example of how a white woman writing on the colonial frontier can 'both challenge settler exploitation of Aboriginal people and at the same time reinforce the belief that their traditional culture will inevitably disappear' (Sheridan 2012, 251). Martin was a close friend, correspondent and travelling companion of Catherine Spence, but she was twenty-three years younger than Spence and published her novels a corresponding thirty years later. Her early life was in the pastoral zone of South Australia in contrast to Spence's urban sphere. Margaret Allen, who compared three South Australian colonial women novelists including Spence and Martin, has explored the confluence of history and fiction in colonial writing:

Their novels and stories operated as powerful tools of social formation, offering their readers representations of themselves, of the German settlers, of the Aboriginal people, of appropriate and inappropriate family patterns, of colonial society, of the Australian landscape and of Australia and of Britain. In these representations, gender is crucial to the classing of characters. The nature of a character's femininity or masculinity or the pattern of gender divisions within a particular family serve to determine class position (M Allen 1991, 351).

Allen points out that the underlying ideology of these novelists identifies ideas and values about gender and class relations which underscore the meaning whereby their work would have been interpreted and evaluated at the time (Sheridan 2012, 249).

I have read the work of Spence and others of the period closely and examined the content of the *South Australian Register* during the years Spence was employed there. I deduce that although Spence displayed sympathy for the displacement of First Nations people in the book review (*South Australian Register*, 19 December 1878, 6) this concern was overshadowed by her great admiration for and association with the colonial development of South Australia. Indigenous Australians remained peripheral to her sphere of interest. Spence's concern for First Nations displacement and welfare is arguably eclipsed by her pride in colonial achievement, and her urban life offered limited encounters with First Nations people. Omissions and silences in the documented record also contribute to situating a narrative in its historical context, as Slotkin (2005, par. 4) points out. These silences can draw attention to their own absence, highlighting the sinister intent of their omission, states Fiona Giles in her analysis of nineteenth-century Australian women's writing (1989, 14). Spence acknowledges her own 'racial blindness' and her shame in it after visiting America ('I Knew Miss Spence' page 108; *South Australian Register*, 17 May 1894, 6).

In the creative work I attempt to draw attention to Spence's racial blindness to reflect the reality of her era. Following the practice of other recent biographers of similar characters and events – Clare Wright (2018) in *You Daughters of Freedom* and Jacqueline Kent (2020) in *Vida: A Woman for our Time* (Spence is mentioned in both) – I have not speculated on characters' awareness of or engagement with First Nations displacement where there is no archival evidence. I acknowledge, as Grenville does in her biographic text (2023, 242), that archival silence in Spence's story is built on a parallel narrative of First Nations dispossession. My lived experience of growing up in rural Australia in the 1950s, when Robert Menzies was Prime Minister and imperialism was central to our identity, makes me keenly aware of how cultural values shift and evolve. As Atwood (2002, 50) and Bair (2020, 326) have pointed out, future generations will judge events through different eyes and we cannot predict the questions they will ask. Spence was a product of her time.

6. Outcomes

'I knew Miss Spence' is a biographical work at the confluence of historiography and the novel, that draws on the defining characteristics of both genres. My authorial purpose is to illuminate the character of Spence, contextualised through the perspectives of her relational others, to augment previous traditional biographic works. The multiple narrators, by definition fictionalised voices since they are no longer living to provide interviews, highlight the breadth of Spence's activities and the tensions of her questioning of established female roles, a tension that I believe is ongoing in Australian society today. This method, contesting the accepted form of biographical narratives by presenting multiple perspectives, contributes to the epistemology of life writing by providing a distinctive and repeatable framework for investigating past lives.

i. Reciprocity of theory and creative practice

Creative Writing research comprises both research into content and research into form
National Association of Writing Programs UK 2008.

My creative work on Spence fulfils this foundational definition of creative practice research by its contribution to both research *into content* (biographical information on Spence) interrelated with research *into form* (life writing from multiple points of view), according to the British NAWP benchmarks (2008, 13, 3.3, italics in original). It deliberately contests the genre boundaries between biography and fiction to illuminate characters within a referential framework. Tunca and Ledent, citing Keener's view of biography and fiction as the endpoints on a continuum, indicate the need to 'explore content through form' in biographical texts (2020, 343), which 'I knew Miss Spence' demonstrates. My approach privileges 'scene' over 'summary' in a manner more usually associated with fiction writing (Cohn 1990, 789) but which also underpins creative non-fiction (Gutkind, 1997, 34). Through dramatisation and other fictive techniques according to the creative writers' maxim 'show, don't tell', originally attributed to Anton Chekov (Cowan 2013, 51), I have reimagined scenes from Spence's life. Andrew Cowan extolls the creative freedom of fiction writing to engage the reader's imagination by inference and detail rather than factual statements (2013, 50). This does not diminish the historical fidelity of the work but rather employs different ways of looking at the evidence, according to some theorists (Schabert 1990, 23; Brien 2015, 4; Vicars 2016b, par. 6).

ii. Writing the past in the present

I am looking back, through her eyes, into a world that I struggle to comprehend
Ursula Hurley (2017, 250).

I am seeking to recover the personality of Catherine Spence within the zeitgeist of colonial Adelaide through the voices of women (and one man) with whom she forged close connections. Historians and novelists, together with authors of hybrid works at the interface of both genres, have debated the role of imagination and perceived empathy in recovering past lives. The difficulty in trying to reimagine lives of people from the past is that we take ourselves, with our twenty-first century values, perceptions and attitudes, with us. ‘We bring to the process the cultural, ideological, national and other biases that every human being possesses. The veracity of our histories, including fictional ones, suffers from these and other distortions,’ emphasises Kremmer (2015, 8). Most importantly we bring the knowledge of what happened, still to be discovered by our nineteenth-century characters. Lindsey posits that through informed imagination, underpinned by contextual research, biographers can offer ‘a portal to the past’ (2018, 3). Denning explains the need for ‘empowering imagination’ in interpreting historical documents: ‘The humanness we share with the past is difficult enough to imagine. The difference of the past is even more so’ (1998, 211). Interest in people from history stems from a sense of connection with them, anchored in shared human experience and the way in which their voices can resonate today.

Novak describes biographical novels about women and by women as the ‘authors’ attempts to reach out across time to other ... women whose lives speak to us today’ (2017b, 223), which is how I interpret Spence’s life and writings. However, Clendinnen emphatically questioned the work of novelist Kate Grenville in *The Secret River* (2006a) for imagining empathy with her characters from the past, arguing that our imaginations and our emotions are a product of our era and culture (2006, 22). Conversely, Alun Munslow (2008, 137) points out that a past reality can only be constructed through our imaginations. Archival immersion does not deliver direct sensory experience but a representation of what may have been. ‘We can work in archives, discuss in disciplined discourse, reflect, observe, read, claim referential authority but, ultimately, we can only persuade through our story making and story-telling,’ Denning attests (2002, 5-6).

Creating empathy with the past through narrative is as important as an impossible attempt to resurrect the past (Munslow 2008, 147). Christine de Matos agrees:

Readers do not just want to know what happened in the past, but to ‘know’ how people experienced that past, how they felt. Why they reacted as they did. Novelists, of course are well aware of the power of emotional story telling ... Embracing the imaginative and drawing on personal emotional experiences would be critiqued as presentism in history writing, but in historical fiction creates a past-present alchemy that minimises the presence of time itself (2015, 7).

She points out that the often-conflicted relationship between history and creative writing, while recognising the ethical obligation for referential verification on behalf of historians, can overlook the two disciplines’ common ground of engaging the literary techniques of fiction in their narration (De Matos 2015, 2). As Polack explains, ‘Fiction is important as a means of creating bridges between audiences and formal history’ (2014, 536). Both are dealing with representations of the past rather than actual events. ‘I knew Miss Spence’ seeks that common ground to provide a pathway between past and present.

Differentiating between ‘history as lived’ and ‘history as written’ is important in framing narratives of the past (Slotkin 2005, par. 2). Slotkin explains that ‘because the novel imaginatively recovers the indeterminacy of a past time, the form allows writer and reader to explore those alternative possibilities for belief, action and political change’ (2005, par. 1). The role of the historical novelist, according to Hilary Mantel, is ‘not to be an inferior sort of historian but to recreate the texture of lived experience, to activate the senses and to deepen the reader’s engagement through feeling’ (2017, Reith lecture 4). Historians also immerse themselves in the context of their investigations, becoming sensitised to the nuance and meaning of their archival findings: ‘Historians, like novelists, are producing literary texts that have their own internal demands of consistency, plausibility and integrity, their own organic rationale derived from decisions about where to begin and end, about which characters to feature, about what relationships to map,’ explains Griffiths (2009, 74.8). Situating ‘I knew Miss Spence’ at the confluence of biography and fiction privileges creative writing techniques over conventions of historiography in order to portray a complex character with emotional depth and nuanced interpretation. It also provides a bridge across time to better

understand different perspectives and in so doing makes a small but cumulative contribution to exploring colonial behaviour and practices.

Contemporary values question much of Spence's public work, which was lauded in her lifetime. Viewed through the post-colonial lens of the twenty-first century, Spence's pride in the development of South Australia, with scant consideration of the displacement and violence inflicted on the local Kaurna people and the destruction of their culture, together with her explicit support for social Darwinism, is disturbing. The value of her philanthropic work with orphaned and abandoned children is doubtful given present-day knowledge of the lifelong damage caused by separation of children from their families of origin (Higgins 2010). Her strenuous efforts towards promoting proportional representation as a key electoral process came to fruition in the Australian Senate and the Tasmanian parliament, but few voters appear to understand the process and its flaws were highlighted in the 2013 Senate election (Lundie and McKeown 2014). However, the causes she championed, implicitly in her novels and explicitly in her newspaper articles, that affect women's lives – easier divorce, contraception, preventing domestic violence and achieving equality in the workplace – continue to be debated. Also, I argue, the competition between women evident in Spence's political career persists, together with a reluctance to lend bipartisan political support to other women in power.

In the re-telling, lives and events from our past are reflected through our knowledge of social change and our inevitably judgemental view of former social norms. Cora Kaplan evaluates feminist writing critiques:

When we look at women's writing ... to see how class and race figure in the text as part of the narrative and argument about women's subordination, we find that these texts and their authors do not stand outside their histories or culture but are implicated in it, just as we ourselves are. It is easy to lose that history, those cultural resonances, or to write them off as simply archaic, historical prejudice superseded by the progressive present (1988, 56).

This statement reinforces the dictum voiced by historians such as Clendinnen (2006) and Munslow (2008) together with writers such as Atwood (1998, 1507), Cunningham (2014, 96) and others, that we filter our view of the past through the lens of the present. Given the seeming inevitability of this process in our writing, how do we best narrate the past with a semblance of authenticity and truth? Saxton explores the relationship of

authenticity and accuracy in historical fiction, concluding that authenticity acknowledges the gaps in a historical narrative, where accuracy cannot be measured against an absence of knowledge (2020, 129). In reconstituting the cultural values underpinning Catherine Spence's life, I have focussed on contemporaneous writings and contextual details while acknowledging that I am inevitably implicated in the narrative, through my authorial selection of material and its interpretation.

Life writing practices demonstrate the ability to centralise some social questions while marginalising others (Tamboukou 2010, 173). Discussion on techniques of constructing a 'self' and the limitations and responsibilities of recognising issues of social class, race or gender is particularly salient to the re-telling of Spence's life and dealing with her colonial-era attitudes to British settlement in Australia. Tamboukou maintains that the author's ethical stance on portrayal of sensitive social issues depends on the readership and the social and historical context of the narrative (2010, 174). Contextual details anchor a narrative in its period and, although they may indicate a work as fiction, enhance its sense of verisimilitude, as discussed below. Stacie Friend points out that contextual details are particularly significant in signposting the writer's intention when hallmarks of both fiction and non-fiction are evident (2012, 11). For Spence, details of her domestic colonial life contribute to our understanding of her views on imperialism, race and feminism.

Bakhtinian analysis of Spence's novels and correspondence reveals a multiplicity of voices within her limited, and predominantly female, social sphere. Although Bakhtin theorised on polyphony in the novel, his findings are equally relevant to researching and writing biographical works. My readings accord with Kremmer's observation that Bakhtin's theories provide a useful framework to explore the complementary relationship between history and the novel (2015, 13). 'Bakhtin's work encourages us to imagine that whilst they remain distinctive writing genres, history and historical fiction can and to a large extent do enjoy a dialogical or polyphonic relationship,' he explains (Kremmer 2015, 15). Foregrounding the point of view of multiple characters by allowing them to tell their story makes interpretative closure, or totalising, elusive. I found this approach useful in articulating the tensions evident in Spence's later life and implicit in her early years.

Bancroft describes specific multi-narrator works as ‘braided narratives’ where ‘different narrators tell distinct stories that both conflict and intertwine in the same story world’ (2018, 266). Such narratives demonstrate that readers can engage with several points of view:

In braided narratives, each character narrator claims space in a subject position and invites the reader to share their perspective for a while. As readers move from one narrative to the next, we inhabit multiple subjectivities and negotiate the space between them. As we hold each narrative thread in mind, we can hear the harmony or the discord between the distinct narrative strands (Bancroft 2018, 274).

I drew upon Lehman’s theory of both author and reader engagement ‘over the edge’ (1997, 39) in my writing of Spence’s nineteenth-century life for a contemporary audience, utilising Bancroft’s technique of a braided narrative to amplify several voices to portray her complex character and situate her in the context of her times.

By re-examining Spence’s life from the perspectives of others, mostly women, in her sphere, I explore the divisive, and I believe persistent, tensions and antagonisms among women that are evident in Spence’s writings and still manifest in twenty-first century Australia. Parini asserts that ‘human nature is a constant ... You find the same kinds of jealousies and affections and interests’ (2010, 99). We need look no further than comments by leading feminist, Germaine Greer, on the figure and clothing choices of Australia’s first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, to recognise the continuing frictions underlying our notion of sisterhood and the different standards to which women in public life are subjected (Q and A 2012, 19 March), as was Spence.

Spence’s own novels were strongly anchored in domestic realism and detail and provide a cultural reference for writing her life (R Smith 2001, 41; Walker 2004, 766; Thomson 1987, xv). The Victorian novelists cited by Novak as establishing a narrative structure for biography (2017a, 5) formed the core of Spence’s own reading (Magarey 2012, 241). In recovering Spence’s life, I have explored the dominant influences in her society and their echo in her writing. I have used intertextual excerpts from Spence’s writing together with some archaic expressions evocative of her own novels in ‘I knew Miss Spence’. This draws on the style of other speculative biographers. Cunningham begins *The Hours* by reproducing Virginia Woolf’s suicide note then subtly anchors the

narrative in Woolf's own reality by the reproduction of her syntax and writing style (Latham 2012, 358). Lodge's biographical novel on Henry James employs similar techniques. Lodge explains that he aimed for a writing style which would be compatible with James' own but not a replica of it (2006, 53). He used extracts and fragments of James' writing to establish the authenticity of his narrative, expecting that 'readers would appreciate some kind of guidance on the relation of fact to fiction in the novel, and by guaranteeing the authenticity of the written documents quoted, I would give them a kind of "reality check" on the events described' (Lodge 2006, 62). I borrowed these maxims in writing Spence's life. I have included the texts of her letters and journalism and deliberately introduced a faint echo of her rather stilted novelistic style but relied more on a sprinkling of archaic expressions to evoke her era.

Many theorists and practitioners of biography and biographical fiction advocate attempted immersion in the lives of their protagonist or imagined projection back into their era. Slotkin advises that:

The idea of novelising an event is to see it from within, from the limited and contingent perspective of those who are caught up in the action. To do all this requires first of all a personal engagement, a projection of yourself into past lives – a finding of what in yourself might correspond to that historically alien consciousness...

You have to learn in detail who the citizens of the past were, where they came from, what kinds of things they would know, how they would think and talk about them. And you have to pretend to forget what you know – how events will turn out, what later generations will say it all meant (2005, pars 12, 13).

In endeavouring to understand Spence's world, forensic reading of her novels, newspaper articles and personal correspondence reveals different facets of her life and interactions. Her published work and books and articles about her, both in her lifetime and posthumously, project a mediated, self-aware and often didactic personality. Her personal correspondence to Rose Scott and Alice Henry shows her warmth and concern for extended family members and a readiness to call out perceived social problems.

The minutiae of everyday life – its textures, smells and small personal and domestic details – help to anchor a narrative in its time and place. Sensory details in the narrative remind us of the subject's physical existence and enable readers to identify with

the situation (Schabert 1990, 87). Historians as well as novelists can imaginatively construct a sense of past reality through metaphor and creative use of language to compensate for direct sensory experience (Munslow 2008, 150). ‘The history of everyday life is now viewed by some historians as the only real history, the centre to which everything else must be related,’ Burke maintains (1991, 11). While archival research offers accounts of major events, it usually omits the small, obscure details of daily life. Mantel stresses the importance of immersion in detail when writing past lives:

When you not only know what your characters wore, but you can feel their clothes on your back: that rasp of homespun wool: that whisper of linen and weight of brocade: the way your riding coat settles when you mount your horse: the sway and chink of the items at your girdle or belt, the scissors and keys and rosary beads. You listen: what sound do your feet make, on this floor of beaten earth? Or on these terracotta tiles? How do your boots feel as you pull your feet out of the mud? How old are your boots? What colour is the mud? When you can answer these questions, you are ready to begin (2017, Reith lecture 4).

Dening describes extant documents and artefacts as contributing to our ‘cultural literacy ... knowing something happened in the past because one has touched a thing or a document that has survived’ (1992, 356). Holding a point-lace collar hand-worked by Catherine Spence and described in her letters delivered me a powerful immersive experience of the past (Spence to Henry, 26 July 1902). I walked in the streets of Adelaide where she would have walked, examined the floor plans of two of her houses (Savings Bank Valuation Book No. 3 1889) and even perused her quarterly wine account from Stoneyfels vineyard. Feminist scholars like Novak (2017b, 226) and Tamboukou (2014, 625) point out that including the type of records often kept by women – letters, diaries and memoirs – as archival evidence helps restore the female sphere of domesticity to the historical record. Small personal details such as her choice of clothes or the food she ate gleaned from Spence’s letters and Lucy’s memoir (Morice 1938) enhance a sense of verisimilitude that I have sought in writing Spence’s life.

Credible biographic representations depend upon either drawing the reader into a sense of visiting now-vanished times or sharing the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings (Popkin 1999, 738). While detailed description evokes a sense of the past, the inner life of a protagonist can only be shared through fiction, unless explicit emotions are

expressed in letters or diaries. ‘Only in fiction does the historical writer have the freedom to fully imagine and represent for the reader the inner life of his or her subject,’ writes Slotkin (2005, par. 25). He advises that representing an event in fictional form is to view it from within, from the perspective of those present. This demands the author’s personal engagement, finding common thoughts and emotions that reach across time (2005, par. 12). My journey with Spence follows Slotkin’s method.

Lehman observes that engagement with fictional texts will become more intense and complex if the persons and events portrayed are based on realities known to the reader. Non-fiction, he posits, already depends on such reference for its power of engagement:

Reading history ‘over the edge’ of text and experience blends the forms of close reading and analysis that allow us to get ‘inside’ a narrative, while at the same time we understand that the narrators of non-fiction – in a way less true than fiction – live ‘outside’ the narrative as well (Lehman 1997, 3).

In examining Spence’s fiction and non-fiction writing, I have considered present-day sensitivities in my interpretation of her work and activities while simultaneously attempting to situate her life story in its zeitgeist.

Projection into the imagined past is fraught with possibilities of misinterpretation. We cannot assume that people in the past thought as we do now (Clendinnen 2006, 20). Archival evidence is rarely unmediated and life writing based on historical documents is filtered by the author’s interpretation. ‘One’s own inevitable location in the present determines the history of the past one writes,’ Scaparo asserts (2005, 39). Both Scaparo and Novak caution against projecting our feminist consciousness of the present onto the lives of women in our past, a flaw they view as common in post-feminist texts (Scaparo 2005, 20; Novak 2017b, 225). Novak offers examples where biographical subjects are situated within the gender expectations of their time and their actions explained and evaluated with regard to prevailing attitudes (2017b, 224). Mantel advocates having characters ‘operate within the ethical framework of their day – even if it shocks readers’ (2017, Reith lecture 2). This is the approach I have taken with Spence, recognising that her disruption of expected female behaviour, although barely significant in the twenty-first century, was in her time likely to raise comment and criticism from her peers. Her personal letters and later recollections from her niece (*Mail*, 24 July 1943, 11) that, for

instance, ‘mother didn’t attend because she did not approve of women speaking in public,’ provide guidelines for recovering Spence’s life.

In the absence of meaningful employment, middle-class women of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were encouraged to occupy themselves with good deeds and were sheltered from the harsher social realities by what is now described as benevolent sexism (Alba 2022). ‘Energetic and earnest ladies of a type peculiar to the late nineteenth century’ is how Margaret Barbalet describes Spence and her cohort of mostly spinster ladies from the ‘intellectual elite’ of the Unitarian Church in Adelaide (1983, 191, 197). The trope of benevolence is common to accounts of colonial women throughout the British Empire, tracing its foundation to the missionary movement that accompanied British expansionism (Hall 2002, 16-22). Tanya Dalziel draws attention to the conflicting ideals of philanthropic work and the unspoken complicity of white settler women in displacement of the First Nations inhabitants (2002, 325). This conflict is not articulated in Spence’s fiction or her newspaper articles. Giles has explored how nineteenth-century Australian women’s writing can be situated in the colonial environment. ‘To read nineteenth-century Australian women’s texts from a late twentieth century [or later] perspective, it is necessary to acknowledge their historical specificity into, or acceptance by, a particular order was more desirable than it appears now,’ Giles maintains (1989, 15). I have followed this precept, endeavouring to situate Spence’s character within her era.

Spence’s challenges to the accepted female role of her time, through her novels advocating expanded employment spheres for women and her later newspaper articles discussing population control and domestic violence, would no doubt have caused embarrassment to her extended family, as she discusses in letters to Rose Scott (31 August 1900). Scaparo examines literary representation of women in the past who rebel against the norms of conventional behaviour and disrupt the cultural norms of society:

These themes include the problem of being seen as someone’s daughter, wife or mother on one hand, and on the other, society’s reaction to a woman’s ambition and achievements, to her struggle to negotiate the demands of others – mainly her family and loved ones—and to attempts to balance her aspirations with the expectations of her community as well as her family (2005, 1).

Scaparo describes these women as exemplars of female achievement. While her definition matches Spence's life direction, Spence was distanced from the most direct criticism by being, perhaps deliberately, single and past marriageable age before she began her active public life. However, the opinions and judgements of her relational others provide the framework for writing her life.

In the closeknit Anglophile community of nineteenth-century Adelaide, even single or widowed women working for financial reward were socially frowned upon as indication that their families could not afford to support them. Fiona Price describes this as a perceived measure of a society's progress (2012, 263). Describing female dependence in an historical Australian context, Claudia Knapman observes: 'Her gracious living, removed from the competitiveness of industry and commerce, was interpreted as a visible sign of male success' (1993, 128). Spence's independent life and her newspaper activism for greater education and employment opportunities for women confounded this expectation.

The ideal woman in the nineteenth-century British Empire was a civilising agent, a moral guardian and homemaker, positioned on a domestic pedestal (Knapman 1993, 127). Anne Summers points out that 'men staunchly defended their role as bread winners ... most women could expect to marry and acquire a respectable status as they worked as mothers and housewives within their own homes ... economically dependent and culturally impotent, their activities and their influences were hidden within the home and hence could be overlooked' (1994, 357). We cannot assume that all women resented or rebelled against their 'pedestal' existence. Magarey emphasises that we also cannot assume, then or now, that women will act collectively in the interests of their gender. 'There is nothing automatic about women perceiving the injustice of patriarchal social formations, much less about women identifying with each other, as women, and organising together to change their worlds' (1996, 96). Media explorations of Australia's female federal politicians have shown their division along political rather than gender lines (Crabb 2021; Strong female lead 2021), underscoring the enduring significance of Spence's life experience and Magarey's observations on the difference between Spence and the women who conformed to gendered expectations of the time (2009, 196).

The lives of 'ordinary' women who did not venture beyond the domestic sphere remain under documented and have been substantially overlooked in archival collections.

‘In the absence of historical records, their stories – if they are to be told – have to be invented. The stories of the invisible can only exist through fiction,’ claims Scaparo (2005, 90). Spence’s ‘lady’s companion’, Ellen Gregory, is typical of such women ‘hidden by history’ (Scaparo 2005, 90). The only official records of her existence are her birth in England, her arrival in Adelaide, her appearance as a witness in a coronial inquest and her death in Melbourne. Unmarried and childless, she left a faint footprint. However, she has achieved a shadowy afterlife in Spence’s correspondence, Young’s biography of Spence (1937, 26) and (less than favourably) Lucy Morice’s brief memoir (1938, 3). From these scant traces, Spence’s fictional characters and other women’s memoirs from the period (Frost 1995 [1840-1883]; Henning 1969 [1854- 1866]; Meredith 1973 [1839-1844]), I have reimagined a voice for Ellen Gregory, marginalised by spinsterhood and financially dependent on Spence.

As a published novelist, journalist and autobiographer, Spence had control of her own documentary record. Scaparo points out that biographies of notable women from the past celebrate them as individual achievers rather than as part of a gendered group (2005, 1). Spence’s literary career, together with her single, childless state, would have served to separate her from other women and place her outside the gendered standards to which women were held because of their domestic commitments (Novak 2017b, 225). I have related Spence’s experience to twenty-first century attitudes to high-achieving women, ventriloquising comments from both the media and personal conversations.

Women deemed important enough to have their life stories recorded experience different forms of marginalisation to ‘ordinary’ women because of their gender. Scaparo suggests this can be addressed by biographers writing about previously unexplored aspects of their lives and exploring their significance (2005, 89). Some feminist critics question the exemplary character of female biography, believing it is not relevant to most women and by its emphasis on ‘greatness’ reinforces the gender imbalance that led to obscuring the contributions of women (Novak 2016, 84). However, Novak asserts that biographies can also serve as positive models for women’s achievement.

Stories of lives that differ from accepted social norms can be often neglected in historiography or, if written, misinterpreted. ‘Alternative histories of the subject call for alternative forms of life writing,’ Sidonie Smith recommends (1993, 396). She sees the ‘exceptional female figure’ of traditional biography as a construct of the biographer’s

personal viewpoint and time. Opportunities exist, Smith indicates, to situate female subjects in multiple interpretations of self and identity, as a ‘multi-voiced chorus’ of narration thus depicting the diverse structural relationships these women have in society (1993, 395, 400). My depiction of Spence seeks to capture this diversity of interactions and display the relevance to society today of those causes to which she was committed.

Not only does the biographer or novelist interpret past lives through the prism of their own experience, but the contemporary reader brings fresh understandings. Bair explains that we cannot anticipate the questions a future generation might ask, making any biographical interpretation provisional (2019, 326). Ursula Hurley describes this process as:

A textual relay, with female biographers working from generation to generation to bring female subjects out of the dark corners and into the light. We stand on a ladder which reaches vertically through layers of history ... peering through the distortions of multiple representations as my own life history becomes the focal lens for my project (2017, 259-260).

In recovering the life narrative of Catherine Spence, I have drawn on my own lived experience on the fringes of 1970s second-wave feminism, as a female journalist, as a witness to changed women’s expectations of education and employment opportunities, and now as Spence’s creative biographer at an age similar to hers when she made her foray into political life.

My creative work ‘I knew Miss Spence’ portrays the character of ‘a woman capable of doing so much’ (Magarey 2010 [1985], 9) reflected through the voices of relational others who helped make her achievements possible: her niece Lucy, who shared Spence’s philanthropic ventures; fellow suffragist Rose Scott; political colleague Jeanne Young and newspaper editor John Finlayson, who took the risk of employing a woman journalist at a time when such a move was unheard of. Most instrumental, however, was the silent presence of Ellen Gregory, who for over forty years shouldered the domestic load, including the day-to-day care of the eight children from three separate families for whom Spence became official guardian. Equally important was the ‘relational absence’ of a life partner. By choosing to remain single, Spence was head of her household and able to make autonomous decisions. She had the freedom to travel around South Australia campaigning for electoral reform or head off to the USA and

Europe for fourteen months. In her later years, Spence enjoyed the company and support of young, similarly single and independent female friends, in a changing world for women which she had helped to shape.

Spence's previous biographers reflected on the difficulty of portraying her complex life (Magarey 2010 [1985], 9; Jones 1983, 48). Alexis Wright expressed similar obstacles in writing her biography of Tracker Tilmouth, 'whose legacy remains in the lives of so many diverse people, all with their unique stories' (2017, 7). Wright's solution was a series of interviews with people whose lives had touched Tracker's. This solution wasn't available to me as Spence had passed from living memory. However, because of contradictions in her archival records, I felt she would be most sensitively depicted through her relational others. Their interviews had to be reimagined from textual traces. By recreating the first-person voices of these narrators from the past, I was aware that by many definitions (Cohn 1990, 792; Lackey 2016a, 5; Phelan 2009, 15) this situated my work as fiction. However, I felt this method best demonstrated the multiple facets of Spence's character, 'to open our imaginations to a particular era' (Parini 2014, 206) and capture the resonance of her life in the twenty-first century.

7. Conclusions

As a practice-led research project, 'I knew Miss Spence' challenges the binary definition between history and fiction by using multiple narrators in biography written in a literary style but following the referential protocols of historiography. It draws on the multi-perspective theory of post-modernism and shares post-modernism's blurred boundaries between fiction and non-fiction by portraying different impressions of the main character and thus presenting a multi-faceted and more nuanced version of her life than a more traditional biography could do. In keeping with post-modern theory, it decentres the biographical subject and does not draw a neat conclusion about her character. However, unlike the tenet of challenging power structures through voices from the margins that defines post-modernism, my narrative is situated within a narrow historical context and a small segment of the white, middle-class society of Spence's life. My objective is to foreground the diversity of perspectives within this microcosm and their enduring relevance. Extracts from Spence's letters and literary works are incorporated into dialogue that, while imagined, is founded on and inspired by evidence. This highlights what Novak and Ní Dhúill describe as 'productive tensions the genre [biographical fiction] creates between biographical facts and authorial licence' (2022, par. 2). If, as Scaparo indicates (2005, 128), facts are the scaffold for biographical novels then citing references makes that scaffold visible and verifiable and reveals the lacunae to be bridged by informed imagination. Bakhtin explains that in the novel, language represents differing sets of social beliefs and the author's choice of words for a character contributes, together with the context of the utterance, to providing a perspective for that character (1981, 358). He points out that heteroglossia may also become evident in the novel by including works of other genres within its structure. Intertextual insertions of letters, notes, poetry or diary entries serve this function, bringing their own language style to the work and increasing its diversity (321).

My creative biography provides an innovative framework for life writing by researching and writing Spence's life from the perspectives of her relational others. My work on Spence demonstrates that 'braided narratives' can apply to texts at the confluence of fiction and biography. The multiplicity of narrators affirms a post-modern interpretation of history as meaningful dialogue from the margins, based on differences rather than a centralised position (Hutcheon 1988, 65), while meeting Bancroft's criterion of encouraging readers to engage with different subjectivities and evaluate different

events and characters (2018, 272). Spence's copious archive provides ample grist for a fresh biographical interpretation.

I have constructed a polyphonic narrative from the points of view of Spence's relational others, each speaking in the first-person to capture the heteroglossia in Spence's documented record and promote a feeling of authenticity in their portrayals. These characters are all included in Spence's own autobiography, bearing out Smith and Watson's proposition that the stories of relational others in autobiography are embedded within the narrative (2010, 86). The evident separation of author and narrator signposts my project as a work of fiction. This is underscored by the use of invented dialogue (Clendinnen 2006, 18; Padmore 2017, pars 14, 15; Grenville 2006b, 202). My objective, however, is to challenge such boundaries, by demonstrating that differing versions and perspectives can remain referential.

Although I have read closely and referenced extant primary documents, this work also owes much to the extensive biographic and literary analyses of Spence by Magarey (2010 [1985]), Magarey et al. (2005), Thomson (1987) and Young (1937). Spence reflected on her own writing in newspaper articles commenting that:

With regard to our own personal experiences in life, it is precisely those passages which have been most valuable and most fertilising to the mind, heart and soul that no one tells ... and this is what makes biographies as a rule too meagre and unsatisfactory. [Novelists] may thus make of the fictitious story a more faithful and more helpful portrait than any commonplace relative or friend could make of what goes by the name of authentic biography (*South Australian Register*, 25 September 1880, 41).

This passage endorses the power of fictive techniques to write a life such as that of Spence, who left a rich legacy of fictional work to enhance her archival record. It gives ethical licence to interpreting her life story through imaginative techniques to capture its diversity. Novak argues that 'like factual biographies, biographical fictions enact the commemorative and exemplary functions of life writing, and contribute to an historical person's "'afterlife'" (2016, 85). She points out that biographical novelists enjoy greater freedom in selecting, amplifying, confirming or contesting the cultural memory of a subject.

My creative biography of Spence draws on both documented and reimagined recollections and opinions of the significant others in her life. Spence's archived letters and literary drafts revealed personal and contextual details through which I could enrich her life story. Forensic reading of Spence's eight novels and extensive newspaper articles provided cultural background that enabled me to situate Spence's life within her zeitgeist. Writing Spence's story and, in particular, building characters around her was further informed by reading the works of other colonial authors. While all characters in Spence's story are people who actually lived at that time and interacted with Spence, Ellen Gregory her 'lady's companion' was the one who left least archival trace. Therefore, her narrative must be fictitious, affording opportunity to voice the point of view of less privileged members of the colonial settler community. Through Gregory's voice I raise issues of social class and highlight the precarious position of unmarried women without financial means or occupational skills.

The position of women, particularly unmarried women, and the perceived opportunities afforded to them by migration to Australia underpin both Spence's novels and her own life story. Spence was intensely proud of her association with the development of South Australia as a British colony and wrote under the pseudonym 'Colonist of 1839' to proclaim her association with the colony since its early days. This is not a sentiment that rests comfortably with post-colonial interpretation and problematises retelling the past in the present with empathy as discussed by Padmore (2017, par.13) and Clendinnen (2006, 23).

The creative component of my project is an inversion of biography, reimagining a life from the perspectives of others. This enables the exposition of conflicting roles and expectations of women evident in the first feminist movement of the 1890s and still relevant today. While I have drawn on Spence's archival records wherever possible, supplemented by characterisations and descriptions from Spence's own fiction, my depiction of Spence, mirrored in the thoughts and voices of her 'relational others', is a work of imagination. I employ both the protocols of non-fiction (referencing, intertextual quotations) and the devices of fiction (dialogue, imagery, combination of scene and summary) to produce a work that engages the reader in both the outside referential world of the characters and the inside imagined world of the text, with the awareness that my authorial choices form an inherent contract with the reader in assessing the 'truth value' of the narrative.

My portrayal of Spence demonstrates how fictive techniques can illuminate archival evidence to present a complex life with verisimilitude through a narrative that can engage the reader both as factual biography and imaginative interpretation (Latham 2014, 117). ‘Biography, autobiography and biographical fiction can...be seen to perform the same cultural work’ according to Novak (2017a, 11). While these works can be based on the same documentary evidence, their modes of presentation differ. Parini (2014, 206) and Mantel (2017, Reith lecture 4) explain how creative interpretation can present past lives with greater emotional and contextual depth than traditional non-fiction narratives. ‘I knew Miss Spence’ reinforces the capacity of creative biography to relate a life story with depth and empathy not available to non-fiction authors constricted by closer adherence to referencing and stylistic protocols. At the confluence of biography and fiction, it illuminates Spence’s life story through responsible imagination, adhering to credible evidence, and thus illustrates how voices of women from the past can speak to women today. My technique contributes to the epistemology of life writing by providing a framework for innovative, creative biography, particularly where the protagonist has a significant literary legacy.

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