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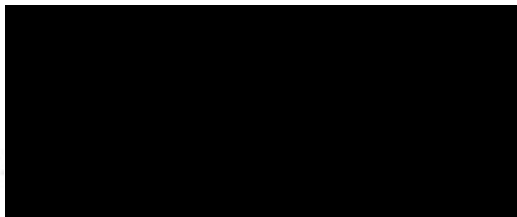
Opening a Window into the Past with Historical Fiction

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BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH HONOURS IN ENGLISH AND CREATIVE WRITING
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains, as its main content, work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution, including Murdoch.

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Abstract

A fundamental challenge facing historical fiction writers is how to provide a ‘real’ window into the past. This thesis explores how writers use the literary devices of point of view and setting to create ‘true’ accounts of historical events. Historical fiction balances the tension between the creation of fiction to entertain and the need for historical accuracy. I argue that by focusing on the minutiae or specific details of setting, readers can be transported to the time and place of the story and a window into the past can be opened. The writer uses point of view to position the telling of the story offering a relationship with the intended reader. The lens, or point of view, used to tell a story, is a mechanism which can bring an historical event into sharper focus for the reader giving them a perspective, albeit a fictionalised one, into history. The literary devices of setting and point of view are explicated in this discussion through my own creative writing resulting in a series of vignettes imaginatively depicting the events leading up to and including the execution of Martha Rendell, the last and only woman hanged at Fremantle Prison in Western Australia.

Acknowledgements

When I first became intrigued by the story of Martha Rendell, I read everything I could about her. My reading led to Dr Neville Hills, great-grandson of the prison wardress who tended Rendell during her last days. Dr Hills led me to my supervisor, Dr Kathryn Trees, who, as I've said to her many times, is a saint. Dr Trees has been patient with me while I found my feet; she has guided my reading; she has willingly listened to my rantings and throughout this journey she has been a wonderful mentor, teacher and guide. My gratitude knows no bounds. My family is probably sick of me talking endlessly about Rendell and I thank them for being patient with me. I also thank them for not complaining when the dinner has been burnt, and when I have been far away in another place. I have been lost between the pages of the many books I have read, or I have been trying to find the doorway back to 1909 Perth so that I could imagine and speculate what life was like for Rendell. Without RHK I would not have the luxury of going to Murdoch and I thank him for that, and for all that he does for me.

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Preface

The Coolgardie Miner, 6 October 1909, page 3¹

THE MURDER OF THE MORRIS CHILDREN TO BE AVENGED THIS MORNING

MRS RENDELL TO GO TO THE GALLOWS

DECISION BY EXECUTIVE AFTER LENGTHY DELIBERATION

MRS RENDELL'S LAST STATEMENT: BEFORE GOD AND MAN, I AM INNOCENT

PERTH, Tuesday night

The cabinet met again this morning to consider the case of Martha Rendell, and decided that the law must take its course. The following statement to her spiritual advisor, the Reverend T Allen was made at 10 o'clock this morning: "After my trial, reviewing all that was said and done, and in spite of the mental anguish which I have suffered through being found guilty of murdering Arthur Morris, and the accusation that I had done the same to the other two children, and the solemn appeals made by my spiritual advisor, the Reverend T Allen, to confess, in order that I might receive the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, and that I might be fortified on the gallows with courage after I had made a clear statement, before God and man, I most solemnly wish to state that, on this last morning of my life, I am innocent of having done anything that injured the children in any degree. The spirit of salts were never used by me on the children. If I had done it I would confess. It would be contrary to my most solemn

¹ <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page24356363>

convictions to profess to man to be innocent when before God I should be found guilty, which to me would be dying with a lie on my lips and a crime on my soul unconfessed and unforgiven. I pray to God to give me grace to forgive those who have sworn falsely my life away.”

This statement was made after the preliminary arrangements have been made with her by the Reverend Mr Allen about her conduct on the scaffold. After the minister had read the statement twice to her she signed it, “Martha Rendell.”

MRS RENDELL: THE CONDEMNED WOMAN THE PRESS TO BE EXCLUDED

The press are to be excluded from the execution.

MORRIS' LAST VISIT

Morris visited Mrs Rendell for the last time this evening.

DISCUSSION IN PARLIAMENT MOTION BY MR WALKER

In the Assembly this afternoon Mr T Walker moved the adjournment of the House and delivered a stirring speech appealing for the reprieve of Mrs Rendell.

The Attorney-General (Mr Nanson) said that the matter had been very carefully considered by the Executive Council, who had not over-looked a single fact in connection with the case. They had even perused the whole of the letters, anonymous and otherwise, which had appeared in the press. After being debated upon the motion was withdrawn.

**VIEWS OF MRS RENDELL'S SPIRITUAL ADVISER
AND OF BARRISTER CLYDSEDALE**

**THE NEW EVIDENCE SUBMITTED TO EXECUTIVE
COUNCIL
YOUNG MORRIS IN POSSESSION OF SPIRITS OF
SALTS**

PERTH, Monday

For several days past the chief topic of conversation has been the fate of the woman, Martha Rendell, who had been found guilty of the murder of the boy, Arthur Morris. The death sentence had been passed and the date of execution fixed, yet there seemed to be a doubt that for several reasons the woman would not be taken to the gallows. Popular feeling was certainly against any remission of the sentence, and there was no appearance of the usual petition for a reprieve. Yet some were busy interesting themselves in the woman's welfare. Chief among these was the Reverend Tom Allen the Methodist minister, well-known on the goldfields, but now of Fremantle, who has been in almost daily attendance upon Rendell since her occupancy of the condemned cell. "But you do not really believe the notorious woman to be innocent of the crime of which she has been found guilty after an exhaustive trial?" the burly clergyman was asked, as he was met coming from a visit to the Attorney-General's office. "Yes, I believe the most the jury could have done had they been in full possession of the facts of the case would have been to have brought in a Scottish verdict of "not proven," which would then have certainly left room for suspicion and the right of the police to prosecute further, but if it were a case of the gallows or swinging open the gates I should gladly say, from what I know, 'open the gates and let her go.'"

The Rev. gentleman, who had headed the deputation to the Cabinet, was first told by one of the ministers that they could afford half an hour's interview. This Mr Allen refused. He claimed that the object of the deputation was one of greatest importance than the ordinary everyday subjects, for it meant possibly the life or death of a woman. So a later hour was fixed, and the whole case was placed before several members of the Cabinet by Mr Allen and Mr Clydesdale. Some additional facts were brought up in the interests of the condemned woman, and the reply received was that the cabinet would hold a special meeting on Monday afternoon to finally consider the case.

Mr Clydesdale, who had worked hard for both Morris and Rendell, as their representative, said that he had done all he possibly could for the woman, and believed the right verdict would have been "not proven." Since the case, he said, additional evidence had been gleaned, which would serve to discount that given by the boy Morris. It was to the effect that the lad had worked at one of the newspaper offices, and had been dismissed for either lying or thieving, or both, and that he had been found with comparatively large quantities of spirits of salts in his possession, which he had obtained from various sources.

Regarding the woman Rendell, both the Rev. Allen and Mr Clydesdale were of the belief, from her attitude, and the marvellous fortitude displayed, that she was not guilty. When pressed by her spiritual adviser to confess all, she repeatedly replied that she had nothing to confess. Had she maintained the same callous, firm demeanour in the condemned cell that had characterised her actions throughout the whole trial. "It seems to me to be a fortitude emanating from innocence," said Mr Clydesdale, "for nobody could sit and listen to the case as she

had done and display such a nerve unless innocent. She is either an innocent woman,” continued Mr Clydesdale, “or she is the greatest embodiment of hell I have ever met. It is truly an extraordinary case.”

The man Morris has been repeatedly seen in the city during the past few days. He wrote to the press and stated that he had been out of town and this accounted for his not visiting the condemned woman, but this story is not believed generally. Were it left to public opinion it is probable that Morris would not now be a free man.

The Daily News, 30 September 1909, page 6²

MORRIS PROTESTS HER INNOCENCE

“SHE WAS EVERYTHING THAT WAS GOOD AND KIND
AND ATTENTIVE TO MY CHILDREN.”

T N Morris, who was found not guilty on the charge of wilful murder, has written the following letter for publication in the Press:

“I pray you will grant me a small space in your valuable paper for this my appeal on behalf of Martha Rendell. I am away in the back blocks seeking work, having spent my last penny. All I possess even my tools, was sold for my defence, so that I am powerless to do anything further than to write to you on her behalf. I have waited until now, hoping someone would take the matter up. I do not know who is the proper person in authority to write to, so I appeal through the ‘West Australian’ to that person. I know that some of the evidence given against me was incorrect.

² <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/rendition/nla.news-article77348327.3.pdf?followup=ddb4ecc088abbf328770c83e89fd225f>

Then why not the same against her? I also know now that evidence could have been called in support of our case, but was not. I left everything to the lawyers, and no doubt they did their best with the money they had. But I say fearlessly, before God, I was innocent, and so is Martha Rendell. She was everything that was good and kind and attentive to my children, and did everything for their benefit. I know her better than anyone else, and I say she was incapable of doing what is attributed to her. She may have appeared hard outwardly, but no woman ever had a more tender heart than she, and I say it would be a shame and disgrace to this country and humanity if the dread sentence were carried out, because I believe that sooner or later her innocence will be proved, and I feel I cannot keep silent and allow this injustice (For injustice it is, God knows) to be done to an innocent woman.

Thomas N. Morris. September 26.

Chronology

1849	Thomas Rendell and Mary Ann Drake arrive in South Australia from England ³
1852-1859	Fremantle Prison, the last convict gaol built in Australia. The construction is based on Pentonville Prison, England and uses limestone quarried on site ⁴
1860	Thomas Rendell and Mary Ann Drake marry ⁵
1871, 10 August	Birth of Martha Rendell at Hope Valley, South Australia ⁶
1873-1880	Death of Martha Rendell's four baby brothers and one sister ⁷
1880	Death of Thomas Rendell. Gallows constructed at Fremantle Prison
1884	Mary Ann Rendell (Martha's mother) remarries a man called Moreton ⁸
1886	Martha Rendell (aged 15) commences work as a domestic servant ⁹
1887, September	Martha Rendell gives birth to a son, William Charles. The father is William Charles Rider ¹⁰
1889	The north west corner of Fremantle Prison is walled off to become the Female Division ¹¹
1890	Martha Rendell gives birth to a son, Alfred who dies aged 3 months. ¹² The father is Alfred Roberts
1891	Martha Rendell gives birth to a daughter, Alice Myrtle Ward Roberts. ¹³ The father is Alfred Roberts

³ Haebich, Anna. *Murdering Stepmothers: the execution of Martha Rendell*. UWA Publishing, 2010, 184.

⁴ Gregory, Jenny, and Gothard, Jan, editors. *Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia*. UWA Press, 2009, 391.

⁵ Genealogy SA reg 43/54 <https://www.genealogysa.org.au/resources/online-database-search/> Accessed 7 Aug. 2019.

⁶ Record no. 7511, Register of Local Prisons, Gaols Department, Western Australia. This record has the following particulars: Religion – Wesleyan, Trade – Housekeeper, able to read and write.

⁷ Haebich, 2010, 186.

⁸ Haebich, 2010, 188.

⁹ Martha possibly leaves home to escape abusive stepfather (Haebich, 2010, 183).

¹⁰ Genealogy SA reg 396/165 <https://www.genealogysa.org.au/resources/online-database-search/> Accessed 7 Aug. 2019.

¹¹ Gregory and Gothard, 2009, 391.

¹² Haebich, 2010, 188.

¹³ Martha is in a relationship with Alfred Roberts who is likely to be the father to her children. Alfred is a cousin to Thomas Morris (Haebich, 2010, 186 & 188).

- 1896** Relationship with married man Thomas Morris (carpenter) and Martha Rendell commences¹⁴
- 1900** Martha Rendell follows Thomas Morris to Perth¹⁵
- 1905** Dr John Cleland arrives in Perth from London and takes up the post of Government Bacteriologist and Pathologist
- 1906, April** Break down of marriage between Thomas and Sarah Morris. Thomas and Martha set up house together
- 1907, April** George, Arthur, Olive and Annie (children of Thomas and Sarah Morris) contract diphtheria
Olive, Arthur and George go on to contract typhus
- 1907, 28 July** Death of Annie May Morris aged 9 years.¹⁶ Cause of death on death certificate from Dr Cuthbert: epilepsy and cardiac weakness
- 1907, 16 October** Death of Olive Lillian Morris aged 7 years.¹⁷ Cause of death on death certificate from Dr Cuthbert: typhoid and convulsions
- 1907, December** Dr John Cumpston arrives in WA. He is an early expert on scarlet fever and diphtheria
- 1908, Easter** Family travels to Bunbury for Thomas Morris's work
- 1908, 10 June** Family returns to 23 Robinson Street, East Perth (cheap rented premises near the railway line)¹⁸
- 1908, 8 October** Death of Arthur Joseph Morris aged 15 years¹⁹

Family moves to Edward Street, East Perth
- 1909, 9 April** George complains of a sore throat, runs away from home²⁰
- 1909, April** Olive, Annie and Arthur's bodies disinterred²¹
- 1909, August** Coronial inquest finds Martha Rendell and Thomas Morris guilty of wilful murder

¹⁴ Martha suffers a number of miscarriages and two stillbirths during her relationship with Thomas (Haebich, 2010, 183).

¹⁵ Haebich, 2010, 184.

¹⁶ Summary of record information from Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

¹⁷ Summary of record information from Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

¹⁸ Stannage, C.T. *The People of Perth*. Perth City Council, 1979, 263.

¹⁹ Summary of record information from Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

²⁰ Hills, Neville. "Martha Rendell: murderer, or medicine and justice gone horribly wrong?" *Biennial Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Society of the History of Medicine*. 1 Oct. 2009, 6.

²¹ Stannage, 1979, 264.

- 1909, 16 August** Police Magistrate Augustus Roe orders Martha Rendell and Thomas Morris to stand trial for wilful murder
- 1909, 7 -11 September** Trial in Supreme Court of Western Australia opens, presided over by Acting Chief Justice Robert Furse Macmillan²²
Crown Solicitor is Alexander Barker
Thomas Morris represented by F.J. Shaw
Martha Rendell represented by James Walker Cydesdale
The Foreman of the Jury is James Chesters
- 1909, 11 September** Martha Rendell sentenced to death by the Supreme Court
- 1909, 2-3 October** Petition delivered to Premier James Newton Moore requesting him to commute the death sentence²³
- 1909, 2-3 October** A public meeting is called to discuss Martha Rendell's case.²⁴ Sympathisers later formed the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment. Members may have included prominent clergy, lawyers, politicians and citizens²⁵
- 1909, 5 October** Martha Rendell meets with the Superintendent of Fremantle Prison
- 1909, 6 October** Execution of Martha Rendell at Fremantle Prison,²⁶ the last woman hanged in Western Australia.²⁷ She is the first person to hang without reporters attending²⁸ although has the largest number of witnesses at an execution at Fremantle Gaol²⁹
- 1911** Establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal in Western Australia
- 1913** Supreme Court able to overrule a jury verdict if contrary to facts presented in the case
- 1964** Eric Cooke is the last person hanged in Western Australia.³⁰ He macabrely shares a grave with Martha Rendell at Fremantle Cemetery³¹

²² Hills, 2009, 7.

²³ Adams, Simon. *The Unforgiving Rope: murder and hanging on Australia's western frontier*. UWA Publishing, 2009, 230.

²⁴ Adams, 2009, 230.

²⁵ "Capital Punishment." *The West Australian*, 15 Oct. 1909, 1. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article26239884> Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

²⁶ Record no. 7511, Register of Local Prisons, Gaols Department, Western Australia.

²⁷ Martha Rendell was the only woman hanged at Fremantle Prison. Two other women were executed in Western Australia: Bridget Hurford was the first woman to be executed in the State on 15 Oct. 1855 and hers was the "first execution at the 'new' Perth Gaol". The second woman to be executed was Margaret Cody who was hanged on 15 July 1871. (Purdue, Brian. *Legal Executions in Western Australia*, 1993, Foundation Press, 5 & 21).

²⁸ Haebich, 2010, 182.

²⁹ Government Gazette 8/10/1909

³⁰ Adams, 2009, 237.

³¹ Haebich, 2010, 169.

- 1984** Capital punishment abolished in Western Australia with the *Capital Punishment Amendment (Abolition of Capital Punishment) Act*³²
- 1984** Death of Thomas Morris's son, George Morris (aged 89) who testified against Thomas and Martha

³² Adams, 2009, 237.

Introduction

*The dead hand of history is always upon us.*¹

In 2018, I visited Fremantle Prison, a major tourist destination in Western Australia. Our guide stopped in the gallows and briefly referred to Martha Rendell who was hanged in 1909 for murdering her stepson, Arthur Morris. My writerly imagination was captured, and I set about researching to learn all I could about the evil stepmother who had savagely painted her stepchildren's throats with hydrochloric acid, and how I might explore her story in fiction. I discovered that in 1907 the Morris/Rendell household became ill with diphtheria during an epidemic² and later that year, Rendell's two young stepdaughters died.³ A year later, her stepson Arthur also died,⁴ and it was for his 'murder' that Rendell was executed. At the time, it was commonly thought Rendell had also murdered her two young stepdaughters. Yet when their bodies were exhumed by the medical profession, there was inconclusive evidence to suggest their deaths had been caused by poisoning.

Fiction is "imaginative writing" and distinct "from writing which purports to be true".⁵ Michael Butor writes that narrative is: "a phenomenon which extends beyond the scope of literature; it is one of the essential constituents of our understanding of reality. From the time we begin to understand language until our death, we are perpetually surrounded by narrative, first of all in our family, then at school, then through an encounter with people and reading."⁶ Stories are the DNA of our communities, they help us make sense of the world around us and to understand where we as individuals fit. Stories can also help us to make sense of the past.

Historical fiction, like all fiction, contains elements of truth which is ultimately, I suggest, why readers engage with it. Truthfulness in this context refers to the universal human truths which fiction encourages readers to reflect upon. Historical fiction writer, Sarah Drummond argues that fiction can "reveal[s] more than the factual history."⁷ Novelist, Colm McCann argues that fiction takes "what is already there" and gives it "a new form."⁸ It is

¹ Thom, James Alexander. *Once Upon A Time It Was Now: the art and craft of writing historical fiction*. 2nd ed., Blue River Press, 2017, 210.

² Hills, 2009, 5.

³ Stannage. 1979, 263.

⁴ Stannage. 1979, 263.

⁵ Hawthorn, Jeremy. *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. 2nd ed. Edward Arnold, 1994, 99.

⁶ Cited in Trees, Kathryn Angela. *Narrative and Co-existence: Mediating Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Stories*, Diss. Murdoch U, 1998, 54.

⁷ Drummond, Sarah. *Exiles and Island Wives: Imagining History's Silent Voices*. Diss. Murdoch U, 2009, 3.

⁸ McCann, Colum. *Letters to a Young Writer: Some practical and philosophical advice*. Bloomsbury, 2017, 150.

essentially an illusion mimicking reality; the characters are ‘real people’ living ‘real’ lives and the reader agrees “for a little while, to inhabit the uninhabitable.”⁹ At this point the collaborative relationship between fiction and the reader begins, and the social contract between the writer and the reader is set. The very act of reading signals the reader’s implicit agreement to the illusory nature of the story. The reader agrees to fill in the gaps and willingly “accept[s] the realities on offer, even enriching them when necessary.”¹⁰ The reader and the writer thus become complicit in the act of storytelling.

Historical fiction occupies the space between fiction and history; its bones are historical fact to which the writer adds flesh through imagination and speculation. Historical fiction distinguishes itself as a genre “by convincing detailed descriptions of the manners, building, institutions and scenery of its chosen setting, and generally attempts to convey a sense of historical verisimilitude.”¹¹ Setting in historical fiction provides background content and minute period detail which Bakhtin calls heteroglossia; it transmits the historical facts and ambience to the reader.¹² Setting, enriched with heteroglossia of the time “plurality of languages of class, gender, region, or ideology”, provides the social and historical context of the story, giving it “the appearance in real life”.¹³ Through research, the writer of historical fiction can discover the minutiae of everyday life from the time period and speculate what life was like for ordinary people, thus providing the reader with an authentic window into the past.

Historical fiction can help us to examine our past and make sense of historical events. Research in the past decade suggests Rendell’s execution may have been the result of a grave miscarriage of justice. For instance, in *The Unforgiving Rope: murder and hanging on Australia’s western frontier*, Simon Adams examines the lives and crimes of people legally executed in Western Australia. Adams analyses Rendell’s case and notes her stoicism was unfathomable and unsettling to the people and press of the day,¹⁴ reminding me of the role of public opinion of the accused’s countenance in the wrongful conviction of Lindy Chamberlain in the 1980s.¹⁵ In *Murdering Stepmothers: the execution of Martha Rendell*, and other various research papers, Anna Haebich examines the life and representations of Martha Rendell as a

⁹ Foster, Thomas C. *Understanding Novels*. A & C Black Publishers, 2009, 44.

¹⁰ Foster, 2009, 44.

¹¹ Hawthorn, Jeremy. *Studying the Novel: An Introduction*. 3rd ed., Arnold, 1997, 57.

¹² Bickham, Jack. M. *Setting*. Writer’s Digest Books, 1994, 44.

¹³ Herman, David., Jahn, Manfred., and Ryan, Marie-Laure, editors. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Routledge, 2005, 213.

¹⁴ Adams, 2009, 232.

¹⁵ When Lindy Chamberlain’s baby daughter Azaria went missing, Lindy was put on ‘trial by the media’ because she faced her ordeal with stoicism and did not emotionally react the way the media and Australian public expected her to.

wicked stepmother and offers plausible alternative explanations for the deaths of the Morris children. In the paper “Martha Rendell: murderer, or medicine and justice gone horribly wrong?”,¹⁶ Neville Hills¹⁷ examines the medical evidence presented in relation to the causes of death for the Morris children and concludes Vincent’s agina¹⁸ (or trench mouth, “a progressive painful infection with ulceration, swelling and sloughing off of dead tissue from the mouth and throat due to the spread of infection from the gums” named after “the French physician Henri Vincent (1862-1950)”¹⁹), poor general health, ill-nourishment, and over-reliance on Tincture of Opium may have contributed to the children’s deaths rather than deliberate poisoning. And in a final example, Tom Stannage in *The People of Perth: a social history of Western Australia’s capital city* considers whether the prevailing public opinion of Martha Rendell as an immoral woman, coupled with the general public anxiety over the health and well-being of working-class children added fuel to the fire in the public’s condemnation of Rendell as a heartless murderess. Rendell was seen as a ‘fallen woman’ and bore the blame for the children’s deaths. Had she been a respectably married woman with an unblemished past it is unlikely she would have been as abhorred as she was by the press and public alike.

From my extensive research into the details of Rendell’s case, I conclude that Martha Rendell was a woman of limited means who was unfortunate to have lived in Perth during a time of great social upheaval. Women’s lives were controlled by their social and economic circumstances²⁰ and it was considered important to keep up a public appearance of respectability. Women at the time held the “sacred duties of wife and mother” and were responsible for “child-rearing and housekeeping.”²¹ Rendell was blamed for the failure of the Morris marriage; unmarried and having pursued a married man, she was judged to have treated the convention of marriage with contempt. Further, she had broken the ‘sacred duties’ of motherhood by leaving her surviving biological children in South Australia to pursue a relationship with Morris. The ways in which Rendell conducted her life were out of step with

¹⁶ Hills, 2009.

¹⁷ Dr Neville Hills is a retired psychiatrist and holds a Master of Law (specialising in mental health law). Dr Hills is the great-grandson of the Matron Jane Cook (nee Findley) who was the Matron in the Women’s Division at Fremantle Prison when Martha Rendell was hung (Heritage Today. *Fremantle Prison Collection Significance Assessment*. Oct. 2017. <https://fremantleprison.com.au/media/1569/sa-2018-website-edit.pdf> Accessed 4 Sept. 2019, 120).

¹⁸ At the time, Vincent’s agina was frequently mistakenly diagnosed as diphtheria and “was associated with poor living conditions” (Hills, 2009, 25).

¹⁹ This definition of Vincent’s Angina is taken from MedicineNet:

<https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=6261> Accessed 18 September, 2019.

²⁰ Crawford, Patricia, editor. *Exploring Women’s Past*. Sisters Publishing Victoria, 1983, 49.

²¹ Schaffer, Talia. “Nothing but Foolscap and Ink: Inventing the New Woman.” *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, edited by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, 39-52.

the conventions of womanhood, motherhood, and family of the time. The press thus branded her a social deviant and the public were convinced she caused the deaths of the Morris children.

Around this time, “fresh scientific ideas about criminality and breeding”²² began to emerge. Italian doctor, Cesare Lombroso believed criminals were lesser-evolved human beings who could be identified through anatomical observation.²³ His “anthropometric measures” classified female criminals into categories of criminality.²⁴ Lombroso’s categories may have classified Rendell as a “born female criminal” who was the “antithesis of femininity: ‘excessively erotic, weak in maternal feeling, inclined to dissipation, astute, and audacious.’”²⁵ Lombroso declared born female criminals to be monsters who would ‘flout’ criminal law and ‘contravene’ the idealised notions of femininity.²⁶ At the end of the nineteenth century, Lombroso “was an authentic worldwide cultural phenomenon”²⁷ and his ideas could have swayed those involved with the Rendell case.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Perth’s urban environment was “notoriously dangerous”.²⁸ The goldrush of the 1890s brought about a rapid increase in Perth’s population²⁹ straining waste disposal, supplies of housing and clean water.³⁰ Consequently, a number of epidemics plagued the city.³¹ During the catastrophic typhoid epidemics of the 1890s, the rates of child deaths matched the birth rate, and other infectious diseases such as small pox proliferated.³² In East Perth, where Rendell lived with Thomas Morris and his children in a rundown cottage, living conditions were dire. An open drain in Coolgardie Street, not far from where the family lived, was known as ‘fever drain’.³³ In 1907 the household became ill with diphtheria during an epidemic. Within two years, three of Morris’s children had died.

²² Adams, 2009, 215.

²³ Mazzarello, Paolo. “Cesare Lombroso: an anthropologist between evolution and degeneration.” *Functional neurology* vol. 26, 2 (2011): 98. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3814446/> Accessed 21 Aug. 2019.

²⁴ Zedner, Lucia. *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England*. Oxford University Press, 1991, 80.

²⁵ Zedner, 1991, 82.

²⁶ Zedner, 1991, 82.

²⁷ Mazzarello, 2011, 100.

²⁸ Adams, 2009, 211.

²⁹ The population of the city more than trebled between 1891-1911. In 1891, Perth’s population was 8,447, in 1901 it was 27,553 and in 1911 it stood at 31,300 (Habeich, 2010, 156). To zoom out a little and look at the state’s population which increased more than five times its size: in 1890 the state’s population was 45,000 and in 1905 it stood at 250,000 (Stoddart, Brian, “Sport and Society 1890-1940 A Foray” *A New History of Western Australia*, edited by C.T. Stannage, UWA Press, 1981, 654).

³⁰ Bolton, Geoffrey. *Land of Vision and Mirage: Western Australia since 1826*. University of Western Australia Press, 2008, 70.

³¹ Oldham, Ray. “The Old East Perth Cemetery, 1829-1988.” *Early Days: journal and proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, vol. 9 no. 6, 1988, 91.

³² Gregory and Gothard, 2009, 185 & 783.

³³ Stannage, C.T. *The People of Perth: a social history of Western Australia’s capital city*. Perth City Council, 1979, 253.

Anna Haebich³⁴ also argues that Rendell did not fit the womanly ideals of the day; she had borne illegitimate children, had been in several defacto relationships while purporting to be married, abandoned her surviving biological children in South Australia and pursued an illicit affair with Thomas Morris who was then married to Sarah Morris. In short, Rendell fitted the stereotype of the female criminal who was “stolid and brazen”³⁵ in her deviant lifestyle choices and emotionless demeanour. I concur that she bore the weight of the prejudices of the day, and on the basis of scant circumstantial evidence the jury found her guilty. Before sentencing her to death, Justice McMillan declared Rendell to be a ‘moral deformity’³⁶ presumably because she had contravened “the very ideal of womanhood as passive, respectable, and virtuous.”³⁷

The execution of Martha Rendell is the material through which I explore the literary techniques of setting and point of view. I do this to forge links between readers and history where imagination and empathy encourage some understanding of others and historical contexts. Chapter One is a series of nine original fictional vignettes depicting the events leading up to and including the execution of Martha Rendell on the morning of Wednesday 6 October 1909. A vignette is a “brief literary sketch or narrative.”³⁸ The vignettes provide a complementary way to consider the circumstances of Rendell’s story (and thus a specific time and place in our society’s past). Setting and point of view, and other literary tools can bring us closer to the experiences of historical figures and characters so that large themes of death and judgement are not abstract occurrences but actualities that impacted on people’s lives. Written after reading the work of researchers and accounts of Rendell’s trial and execution reported in the newspapers³⁹ of the day, the vignettes offer the reader six different perspectives of this historical event including: an eye-witness to the execution; Martha Rendell on four different dates; a young prison wardress; a well-to-do socialite; the daughter of the religious minister attending Martha Rendell; and the hangman. The verisimilitude of the vignettes, particularly the use of setting and point of view, create a sense of reality to allow the reader to reflect on

³⁴ Professor Anna Haebich is an Australian writer, historian and academic. She is a John Curtin Distinguished Professor and Senior Research Fellow in the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin University (The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia <http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0415b.htm>).

³⁵ Stannage, 1979, 265.

³⁶ Haebich. 2010, 9.

³⁷ Zedner, 1991, 2.

³⁸ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online* <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary> Accessed 12 September 2019.

³⁹ Newspapers read included *The West Australian*, *Truth*, *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, *The Daily News*, *Westralian Worker*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Coolgardie Miner*, *Geraldton Express*, *W.A. Record*, *The Northern Star*, *The Geraldton Guardian*, *The Braidwood Dispatch*.

whether justice was served by Rendell's execution. The legal machinery of 1909 was vastly different to the current legal system. Today, the Coroner no longer "judge[s] guilt"⁴⁰ and simply presents findings. A Court of Criminal Appeal was established in 1911, and in 1913 the Supreme Court was given the power to overrule a jury's verdict if deemed contrary to the facts given in a case. Additionally, in 1984 capital punishment was abolished in Western Australia. Today we would ask whether it had "been proved beyond reasonable doubt"⁴¹ that Rendell had murdered Arthur Morris. Hills concludes that such "proof is hard to find."⁴² Rendell's execution as the subject for the vignettes presents the reader with contrary representations of the events from those provided by official history. Their verisimilitude allows the reader to view the past from an 'angle of vision' which positions them to be empathetic or not to the plight of Rendell and to question the morality of her execution.

In Chapter Two, I discuss setting as a key element of historical fiction. I begin with an account of the differences between official historical writing – or academic historical writing, which Hatcher⁴³ refers to as 'sober history' – fiction, and historical fiction. Writers of historical fiction, in contrast to historians, find the gaps in historical records and use imagination, creativity and literary devices to flesh out those gaps. By using the minutiae of everyday life within setting the reader's senses can be evoked and they can be immersed within the time of the story. The inclusion of accurate and specific details within the setting of historical fiction can help history to come to life for the reader.

In Chapter Three, I discuss point of view as the lens used to filter the story and the position from which the story is told. I explain how the relationship between the narrator/s, story and reader is developed by the writer's use of point of view. Point of view allows particular facts and feelings to be provided to the reader positioning them to feel a certain way towards the narrator and the narrator's perspective of the storyworld and its events. Storyworld here is used to mean the environment in which characters interact and act out the drama of the story.⁴⁴ I conclude by arguing that point of view helps the story come alive for the reader. It sets the novel's direction and positions the reader, in this case, to view the story's events empathetically.

⁴⁰ Hills, 2009, 11.

⁴¹ Hills, 2009, 26.

⁴² Hills, 2009, 26.

⁴³ Hatcher, John. "Fiction as History: the Black Death and beyond." *History, The Journal of the Historical Association*, 2012, 3.

⁴⁴ Herman et al, 2005, 570.

This thesis explores how writers use the literary devices of setting and point of view to create 'true' accounts of historical events. Setting with the minutiae or specific, concrete details of everyday life facilitate the reader's journey into the past. Who tells the story, the point of view, is an essential part of the narrative framework influencing the structure of the story and determining what a reader can know. Above all, the use of these devices must work to ensure the story is convincing and upholds the story's illusion of reality.

Chapter One

Vignettes on a Hanging

1.1 Harold Alfred Brown, 7 October 1909

The jury chose not to believe her shallow defence and Martha Rendell remained emotionless in the dock as she was sentenced to death by hanging.¹

On the morning of Wednesday 6 October, I rose early to witness the hanging of Martha Rendell. I was one of twenty-five men to witness her execution for which I count myself a fortunate man. Acting as witness bears testimony to my reputation. My hard work and sober character have been rewarded. My new role of Justice of the Peace shall suit me fine.

It was a mild day and my wife pinned a flower in my buttonhole before I left the house. I strode through a crowd of newspaper reporters gathered at the prison gates and tipped my hat as I went by. One or two would surely have recognised my person.

Once inside the prison grounds, I was escorted to the small limestone building housing the gallows. I watched with interest as the procession walked across the gravel yard. Dr Ernest William, the Prison Medical Officer and Superintendent William Andrew George, dressed in a fine immaculate frock coat and bell-topper, led the procession. Behind them was Deputy Sherriff Burt Bonner followed by Reverend Allen whom I met once while on business in the goldfields. The Reverend is what one would call a sop. He worked with a small group of citizens to have the woman's execution commuted and of course, their efforts failed miserably. He read the Service for the Burial of the Dead, his face harrowed for he was obviously under great strain. The condemned woman walked behind the Reverend with two nurses to assist her for a bandage covered her eyes. She was as composed as she has been throughout the court proceedings; proof of her heartlessness, she is a cold-blooded being.

Martha Rendell was found guilty of murdering her husband's son and most believe she poisoned Morris's two daughters. The court found she painted the children's throats with hydrochloric acid. This was no surprise to me as many lady killers poison their victims. They

¹ Kidd, Paul B. *Australia's Serial Killers: the definitive history of serial multicide in Australia*. Pan Macmillan, 2006, 64.

are vile, evil creatures who have reverted to a primitive stage of humanity and kill to satisfy their blood lust.

The woman appeared smaller and more haggard than during her trial. The hangman walked behind in a plain suit of black. A dark hat and a black cloth mask attempted to hide his identity although I know he is Jack Ketch who goes by the names of Walker, Courcher and Elliott. I heard he once made his living upon the sea as a navy flogger. Two prison wardresses brought up the rear of the procession. They were visibly distressed, although I know not why. Surely they understand it is a privilege to bear witness to the turning of the wheels of justice.

Inside the gallows Mrs Rendell was guided onto the trapdoor. The rope hung suspended from a great beam. Her calm demeanour continued although under my keen observation, I noted her lips trembled when the hangman pulled a white canvas hood over her head. He looped the dangling noose over her neck and adjusted it to fit snugly under her jaw and drew it tight. All was in place. The hangman is a laggard who skulks about like a rascal but he is precise with his calculations for the hanging rope. I did not expect the woman to unduly suffer.

The hangman drew the bolt at the first stroke of 8 o'clock. The trapdoor swung open and the body fell into the pit. A blanket covered in sawdust was at the bottom of the pit but it was not needed as there was no blood spilled. At three minutes past the hour, the body swung lifelessly. Dr William checked for signs of life. There were none. The hangman had performed his task perfectly.

Before midday a burial cart loaded with a plain box from undertakers Messrs A. E. Davies transported Mrs Rendell's body to Fremantle Cemetery. A great many people lined the streets to the cemetery no doubt to see that justice had been served.

1.2 Martha Rendell, 7 September 1909

I am the stories that I tell about myself, the stories that others tell of me and those yet to be told. I am the place where I was born, the places I have been and are yet to go.²

I arrange my face to hide how I feel. A hag sits in the gallery. I look away from her wild eyes. She drags a filthy shawl about her shoulders and shakes her head from side to side, spittle flies forth. I close my eyes.

² Trees, 1998, 17.

I vow to ignore the creature and gather my thoughts. I so wanted Thomas's children to be well, and yet, one by one, they slipped away and left me in this courtroom. My eyes dart about the gallery. Not one kind face turns a gentle eye upon me.

'Child-killer.' The creature's hiss silences the gossips. A scream loud enough to wake the dead rips through the court. The bailiff strides across the room, his shoes ring out on the wooden floor as he hauls her away.

I breathe out slowly and think on my words. Surely all will see me as I am.

1.3 Edith Fairgrove, 9 September 1909

Confession is good for the soul.

*Old Scottish Proverb*³

Dearest Agnes,

Darling cousin, I hope my letter finds you in perfect health and joyful spirits.

The weather is frightfully hot, and I do not think I can bear another summer. How lucky you are to be surrounded by rolling green hills.

Darling Jonathan has asked Reynolds to plant a rose garden. I have visions of a trellis of dusky pink blooms like the ones at Wellesbourne Hall. Do you remember how beautiful the house looked with pink roses climbing its red walls? I am hopeful our rose bushes will drive away the awful miasma of the street. Thus far, nothing has bloomed in the sand. Reynolds goes out faithfully every day with his watering can and waters the rosebushes which are proving to be as difficult as my housemaid.

Can you share any advice for handling stubborn and disrespectful servants, dear one? Jonathan says I am far too soft. He's told me to advertise for another maid. But the darling man forgets Lily came highly recommended from Mrs Augusta Woods. If I let Lily go, what will Mrs Woods think of me?

Have you heard of the horrendous scandal? The devil dwells amongst us. A woman murdered three children. They say she poisoned her husband's children. Although, the pair were masquerading as man and wife! The woman is a strange creature. She sits in the dock

³ Kelly, J. "Complete Collection of Scottish Proverbs", 1721 in Browning, D. C. *Everyman's Dictionary of Quotations and Proverbs*, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1959, 454.

with her face as still as a marble statue and hardly utters a word except to protest her innocence. I do not know what to think except the newspapers are quite sure of her guilt.

I take the carriage and sit in court every day. Jonathan disapproves. He says my behaviour is somewhat unbecoming, although I don't believe he minds a whit because upon my return he asks a great many questions: Who did I see? Was Mrs Mayhew there? Did she take her carriage? Was Mr Owens smoking a pipe? Did I pay my respects to Mrs Woods? Jonathan says I must take great care. I am never to speak to the newspaper men and never to let them take my picture.

My sleep is troubled by the woman. I wake in the night and I am certain something has happened to the children. I hover over their bedsides and check they are breathing. I cannot wait until this trial is over and life can continue without this dark shadow hanging over us.

Oh darling, my cherubs are growing fast. I am over the other bother, and darling Marion will be five in February. She has golden ringlets and the brightest of eyes. Jonathan says she takes after her mama which makes me blush as if we were still courting.

Frederick is a strapping lad of six. He is rowdy but such a dear. He often throws his arms about me. Jonathan says I am far too soft on the children and I will ruin them the way I have ruined the servants. He says the children should be corrected and if I won't do it, he will take on the task himself.

I must put down my quill and bring this letter to a close, darling. Please write as soon as you receive my letter for I am desperate to read of your news.

Ever Yours,

Edith

1.4 Martha Rendell, 16 March 1907

And you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways. And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you.

Deuteronomy 28:29

Sometimes when Thomas is away and the children are abed, I place the oil-lamp on the wash-stand and stare into the glass imagining a garnet brooch at my throat. What could life have been if Thomas had not married Sarah? Thomas would have been free and instead of

Sarah's children sleeping, our babes would be curled on their sides. Our sons would have Thomas's eyes and our daughters Mother's curls.

When Annie or Olive moan in their sleep, I carry the lamp to their bedside, and lay my hands on their hot faces. I sink to my knees and pray to the Lord to keep Thomas's children free from fever for it no more matters if they are Sarah's babes or my own. The Lord has already taken my dear sweet Alfred. He was a beautiful babe, how I loved to sit in my rocking chair by the fire while he nursed. I would stare into his deep blue eyes. How still those eyes became. How cold he was when I lifted him from his cradle and found he had passed on without a whimper or a cry. While I'd been sleeping, my baby boy had slipped from this earth. I put thoughts of his brother and sister far away for I have not been much of a mother to them and this I regret sorely.

I cannot help another prayer slipping in, this one for a few more pounds for surely the good Lord understands how hard it is to be poor? If we only had more we could move. If only Thomas would take us to a place with clean air, where the eyes do not spy, and the tongues do not wag.

I tally up the bills not paid. We owe the grocer, milkman, baker and chemist. If I send for Dr Cuthbert again for poor Annie, there will not be a penny to spare when Arthur is in desperate need of a new pair of trousers and my boots are worn through. If we had more surely the shame of being poor would leave us, and we could stop worrying about the neighbours' sideways glances.

Some days when Thomas has been away for weeks and I am so lonesome, I steal away. Once the girls are at school and the lads at work, I pretend the housework is done and take up my basket and hat. Instead of making for town, I keep walking. I walk up the hill to St Bartholomew's Church and walk between the graves. At the farthest corner where no one can see but a few grazing sheep and horses, I unpin my hat and lay my shawl upon the ground. Down in the tall yellowing grass I lie staring up at the white clouds. Before long, my thoughts turn to heaven. I muse upon my death for I am certain I shall die before my time and it will not be long before I hold sweet Alfred in my arms again. Will Thomas walk behind the burial cart holding tight to the small hands of Annie and Olive? Will he lay white lilies on my grave?

When I have lain in the grass for far too long, I shake myself and pin up my hair and wonder how much time has passed while I have daydreamed the day away when the fire is not lit and the scrubbing won't do itself, and supper will not appear on the table without me. I smooth down my shirtwaist, put on my hat and pick up my wicker basket. The streets are dusty as I head for home. I try to put my children out of my head, leave behind my sorrow for baby

Alfred and pray that William and Alice have grown up strong and healthy. I thank the Almighty that Father didn't live to see how my life has turned out.

1.5 Ruth Allen,⁴ 4 October 1909

*'Who does the best his circumstance allows,
Does well, acts nobly; angels could no more.'*

Edward Young⁵

Pater is slumped in the doorway in the dim light of evening. Mother and I both rise when we see him. Mother leaves her needlework on the chair and I pick up the tea kettle to make Pater a soothing cup of tea. I leave the kettle because Mother reaches for the sherry decanter. Pater downs the amber liquid in one gulp. His hands shake before Mother takes hold of them. Pater's eyes are so downcast that when his shoulders begin to heave, I flee the room.

Since Mrs Rendell has been imprisoned, Pater has sat with her whenever he can to offer spiritual counsel. With each passing day, he looks more and more worn down. Mother frets he is working his fingers to the bone with his hurrying and scurrying and worrying and meetings. If Mrs Rendell should hang, Pater will attend her in the gallows and afterwards. But I dare not dwell on this ending, for what will it do to my poor Pater?

1.6 Martha Rendell, 8 September 1909

*'The jury, passing on the prisoner's life,
May in the sworn twelve have a thief or two guiltier than him they try.'*

Shakespeare, Measure for Measure 2.1.19-21⁶

The handkerchief is snowy white, lined with lace. Mother pressed it into my hands before I left. She'd embroidered my initials in perfect stitches and embroidered tiny red and

⁴ Ruth is a fictional daughter of Reverend Thomas Allen and the mother and daughter included here are not intended to bear any resemblance to the "real living" family of the Reverend.

⁵ Young, Edward. "Night Thoughts." in Browning, D. C. *Everyman's Dictionary of Quotations and Proverbs*, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1959, 410.

⁶ Shakespeare, William. "Measure for Measure." in Dover Wilson, John. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Cambridge University Press, 1980, 97.

blue flowers too; blue for forget-me-nots and red for roses. A long time ago, I arranged flowers in Mother's treasured crystal vase. It sat on the mantelpiece where sunlight found its way through the fine cut glass and when the rose petals withered, they fell to the floor. I cannot stop my fingers reaching for the soft cotton. Why did Mother's gift make our parting so hard to bear?

The handkerchief is tucked into the waistband of my skirt. On the days when I cannot go on, I reach for it and imagine Mother sitting under the window, her fingers making one stitch after another. I know this courtroom is not real. It cannot be real when Mother had such hopes for my future. I look around and try not to see the ladies staring. Instead, I admire their hats and brooches and remember the excitement of wearing a new dress.

Sunlight comes in through the windows and dust motes dance. The judge's bench needs a proper polish. I would happily take up my rags and polish and rub at the wood by Justice McMillan if I could leave this chair. I would shine and polish until the wood was like new. Mr Barker's wig looks in need of an airing. If I could, I would hang it on the washing line in the sunshine. I would bang and bang and bang at it again with the carpet beater until it is no more. Without his wig, he cannot stand in front of me with his sly, beady eyes trying to see inside my head. I try to listen to his questions, but I cannot stop staring at his mouth. It reminds me of something awful, but I cannot say what.

I shudder. This cannot be real. This cannot be happening. If only I would faint, then somebody would press a wet cloth to my brow. Perhaps they would call for Dr Cuthbert. But instead of fainting, I reach for my handkerchief. I look to where Thomas sits slumped and I see in his eyes that he loves me still and cannot believe they think me a poisoner. When this is over, Thomas and I will go away together and we will begin our life anew.

1.7 Bessie Donaldson, 6 October 1909

I am completely and absolutely innocent of the crime for which I am dying.

Last words of Martha Rendell⁷ prior to her execution 6 October 1909,

Fremantle Prison

⁷ "Execution of Martha Rendell." *Westralian Worker*, 8 Oct. 1909, 4. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article148597023>. Accessed 14 May 2019.

I was dead afeared that today would come. Instead of lying in misery, I slip out of bed, smooth the sheets, pull up the well-washed quilt and tuck it neatly under the horsehair mattress. My room is small, though the white rough plaster on the limestone walls makes it seem bigger than t'is and I am grateful nae to share. At home, I shared a bed with my sister, Lottie whose never-ending chattering, icy feet and mean habit of stealing the hot brick in winter makes me miss her less than I ken I should.

I run my fingers along the edges of the cool stones before my eyes lift to the wooden cross above the bed.

“God be merciful to me a sinner,” is my whispered prayer. Mercy has surely grown wings for t'Almighty has ignored each and every one of my prayers of late. I am beset with fear and worry. Nothing will save her, not my hurried prayers. Only a reprieve from Parliament could save her now.

At the thought of the hangman's greasy, hempen rope, hot knots roil in my belly and I hurry outside to the privy. A strip of pink shows above the top of the door and honeyeaters call from the trees. How dare the unseeing sun rise so easily and paint the sky such pretty colours when my heart is so very heavy. How dare the birds sing so freely.

The air is heavy with wood smoke. Each warder's cottage hunkers down as if they too wish this day was not here, thin ribbons of grey smoke escape from the chimney tops. From the street comes the rattle of carts and carriages as horses pull their loads and ships' horns blast from the harbour. The day is moving along when in truth it all should stop. How does the clock tick so mercilessly while poor Mrs Rendell prays quietly in her cell? How can she have killed when her eyes are so gentle and her words so kind?

White rose petals lay scattered across the path as if in readiness for death. I twist my hands together and close my eyes. I cannot bear this, cannot bear to see her on this her last morning when she is so close to death. When Mr Morris came to her, I thought my heart would break. They sat quietly together. Matron said they could meet in the garden but I was to keep watch and raise the alarm if anything untoward should happen. I watched from a distance. He took her hands in his and she whispered his name. Her eyes full with tears, and he with such a look of love on his face. I turned away then because it pained my heart to see such sadness. It is a terrible thing when an innocent woman is hanged. Oh, may God have mercy on all our souls.

The clanging of the prison bell rouses me from my stupor. Such ringing marks my days. I'm the youngest wardress and I tend to the imprisoned. Mrs Rendell entered the prison a few

weeks hence, and I fear I'm changed. Never before has a female prisoner gone to the gallows at Fremantle Prison.

'Bessie, is that you?'

The back door of the wardress cottage swings open and matron stands in the doorway with a shawl about her shoulders.

'Aye, good morning, Mrs Lewis.'

'Hurry now, hen. There's not a moment to lose.'

As I move towards the door, I couldna help but see six ravens on the roof. I try telling meself that six birds don't mean a thing and I'm wrong. My granny use to say that superstition is for the ignorant and poor, but I couldna help ma shivering.

Water splashes from the jug as I pour it into the basin. I wash quickly, button my black dress and fasten an apron at my waist before standing at the window to watch the pink morning sky turn to blue. The birds' feet scratch on the tin roof as they squawk into the air. Their shadows pull away and disappear. My heart grows wearier.

'Morning, Miss.' Old Joe at the guardhouse tips his hat. The iron gate bangs, gravel crunches beneath my boots. I carefully hold the wicker basket under my arm. The smell of freshly baked scones escapes from under the crisp white cloth. Mrs Lewis may be strict and her tongue harsh, but she is a kindly woman.

'A little something fresh and made with love for her breakfast,' she'd murmured as she passed me the basket. I added a posy of white roses. We would make her last breakfast worthy.

1.8 Martha Rendell, 1 October 1909

If I had done it, I would confess.

*Martha Rendell*⁸

The hollow eyes of the dead visit me in the early hours when the light has not yet turned, and dark shadows lurk in each corner of my cell. I wake chilled. How different life would be if only the good Lord wasn't greedy for children; mine and mother's and Sarah's, too.

Memories haunt my sleep. The smell of death. I watched them butcher poor Arthur. I knew I had to stop the sacrifice of Thomas's boy.

⁸ "Closing Chapter of The Remarkable Morris Mystery." *Truth*, 9 Oct. 1909, 5. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article207402944>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

‘Stop,’ I shouted. Dr Cleland did not stop. He turned his eyes to Arthur’s stomach and peeled back the flesh. I raised my handkerchief to my face, the stench of death was everywhere. I fancied there were grave worms and maggots crawling, picking their way through Arthur like women picking over vegetables at the grocers.

‘Stop.’ I shouted again. Dr Cleland peered over his spectacles.

‘Mrs Morris, it is important that we ascertain exactly how the boy died.’

Why were they doing this? It was too late to save poor Arthur. He was dead, had been dead for many months. And oh, the vile stench and the rot of death. How could they massacre his body? Had he not suffered enough?

‘I will not allow it.’ I wiped my shameful tears. They stopped cutting to turn and tut at me. At last they stepped back and allowed the gravediggers inside. Poor Arthur was put back in his thin wood coffin. I was mortified to see the wood split. I pulled my bonnet around my face and hurried home to Thomas. If only I could hurry home to Thomas now.

1.9 Jack Ketch,⁹ 6 October 1909

“Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?

*No, this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine,
making the green one red.”*

Shakespeare, Macbeth 2.2.60-63¹⁰

Tuesday night I took the train. The superintendent had sent a man to meet me with a horse and buggy. I spent the night in my usual cell working on my sums, making sure I measured the drop correct. T’was early the next morn when a guard unlocked the door.

‘The superintendent would like a word.’ The guard’s eyes were glued to my bag where I keep my kit.

‘Right you are.’ I put down my razor and dried off my face. Picking up my hat and bag, I followed the man across the gravel quadrangle.

‘Are you ready, my good man?’ Superintendent George ran a hand over his chin.

I nodded, it’s not for me to decide whether they be guilty or not. I just do the job which I’ve done many times afore and my mind wasna troubled.

⁹ Jack Ketch was the false name often used to refer to State executioners.

¹⁰ Shakespeare, William. “Measure for Measure.” in Dover Wilson, John. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Cambridge University Press, 1980, 867.

'I thought whisky would be better than ale.' He poured me a large measure, but his hands shook like the devil. What t'was the matter with the man?

We walked through the prison in silence. T'was a bonny day and I saw past the gates, o'er the town and down to the blue waters of the sea.

The woman was blindfolded. She couldna see the day as fine as any and not a cloud in the sky. Her hands were tied behind with leather shackles. Two nurses walked by her. I watched each step she took for I was right behind.

The procession was led by the doctor and superintendent. Behind them was the Deputy Sheriff and then came the shuffling miserable churchman. His voice a low drone of words, prattling away like an old woman. The woman didnae falter once. Behind my mask, I breathed in the sweet salty air and watched the gulls overhead. T'was a different life on the sea.

The chamber wasna dark nor gloomy. Afore eight o'clock I moved the woman o'er the trapdoor. My footsteps were loud on the wooden floor. I drew a hood over her head and bent to pinion her legs with leather ankle straps.

I positioned the noose careful to keep the steel eye at the back of her neck. I didnae mean to startle her but she took her last breath in one gasp like a fish who knew he was a goner. The churchman turned hissself leeward as if he couldn't stomach what was coming.

The superintendent looked over. I reached for the lever and drew the bolt smoothly across. T'was a loud bang. The drop was four feet six inches and the body fell. I watched it swing and a peculiar feeling came over me.

When it was all done and dusted, I picked up my fiver and left the gloomy place. I walked quickly through the newspaper men at the gates, but they didnae heed me. I turned back, an unkindness of ravens watched me from the clock tower. I tore down the hill as fast as my legs could carry me and my heart lightened to see sweet Amy waiting for me. She said we'd best have a drink. Bless her. After a drink at a hotel, we boarded the train with a parcel of fried fish for our lunch and headed home.

Chapter Two

Historical Fiction Comes Alive Through Setting

Fiction takes the skeleton of historical fact and, without changing the structure, adds flesh, muscle, organs, and most of all, the breath of spirit.

Dayton Duncan¹

The tools of literary narrative help the writer step through the doors of the past to bring historical events to life for present and future readers. In this chapter, I argue that an authentic representation of historical setting “achieved without too many sacrifices of accuracy and complexity”² provides access to credible fictional representations of the past. I explain the differences between history (such as ‘academic history’ representing “scholarly standards and accuracy”³) and historical fiction. I argue the writer of historical fiction has a responsibility to offer an accurate representation of the time and place, that is, the historical setting or the milieu of their story.⁴ I define the term setting, explain its use in historical fiction, and discuss its relationship with realism drawing on instances in the vignettes from Chapter One to demonstrate application of these ideas. I conclude that through the use of setting, in particular, the description of everyday minutiae (“with close attention to facts and details”⁵), the writer of historical fiction can provide a ‘true’ representation of the past.

2.1 Where History and Historical Fiction Differ

For Hayden White, history is “a true account of the world.”⁶ He and other historians draw on source materials including government and church records, and artefacts to write history or official narratives. Official narratives “determine ‘what is knowledge’ and ‘what

¹ Thom, 2017, 220.

² Hatcher, John. “Fiction as History: the Black Death and beyond.” *History, The Journal of the Historical Association*. 2012, 9.

³ Hatcher, 2012, 8.

⁴ At times the writer crosses the boundary between historical fiction and fantasy, and setting is moulded into a different form where the facts of history are shaped to fit the narrative. An example is Celine Kiernan’s *The Moorhawke Trilogy* where her fantastical storyworld is set within an alternative renaissance Europe.

⁵ Hatcher, 2012, 8.

⁶ White, Hayden. ‘Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality.’ *Rethinking History*, vol. 9, no. 2/3, 2005, 147.

functions as truth.”⁷ The writer of historical fiction uses these sources, finds the “gaps and holes in historical records,”⁸ fleshes them out (blending real and imagined characters and events) and uses literary imagination to provide the ‘reality’ of the time within a fictional narrative. The reality of historical fiction includes the ‘minutiae’ or the specific, accurate details of daily life; the costume, food, household routines and social mores of the time. By using historical sources, the writer can recreate everyday life and situate it within imaginative writing to transport the reader to the time and place in which the story is set.

Sir Walter Scott penned the first historical novel in 1814 (*Waverley*), which according to historian Alfred Rieber, “had an enormous influence on historians”.⁹ Instead of seeing the past in terms of “abstractions,...diagrams and theorems”, Scott represented it “people[d] by living men”, and situated his characters within a particular historical time and place with “the idioms, features, and vitalities of very men.”¹⁰ His historical fiction “was the stuff of social history.”¹¹ Scott’s novels were concerned “with historical personages and events” and “evoked the past in terms of culture, ideology, manners and morals – by describing the whole ‘way of life’ of ordinary people.”¹² The Russian poet, playwright and novelist Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin was influenced by Scott’s use of the historical novel. He viewed the form and genre as an ideal medium for retaining “a sense of historical distance” while at the same time narrating “events as a story.”¹³

Historical fiction can include both real historical figures and imagined characters to give the reader an ‘angle of vision’ into the social and cultural mores of the story’s time period. Writers of this genre set their stories within an historical context and “attempt[s] to convey the spirit, manners and social conditions of that period providing realistic details and fidelity to historical fact.”¹⁴ Drummond explains that historians “fashion[s] the words around the characters and events to present a [true] history” and that writers “fashion[s] events and characters” to provide the reader with “deeper, intuitive truths.”¹⁵ McCann suggests that

⁷ Trees, 1998, 12.

⁸ Forsyth, Kate. *The Blue Rose*. Penguin Books, 2019, 361.

⁹ Rieber, Alfred J. “A Tale of Three Genres: History, Fiction, and the Historical Detektiv.” *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Genre Blends*. Edited by Megan M McArdle, Chicago American Library Association, 2015, 353.

¹⁰ Rieber, 2015, 353.

¹¹ Rieber, 2015, 353.

¹² Lodge, David. *The Art of Fiction*, Penguin, 1995, 131.

¹³ Rieber, 354.

¹⁴ Mihaescu, Cristina. “The Historical Novel: An invitation to know our past.” *Euromentor Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, 83.

¹⁵ Drummond, 2019, 23.

creative writers owe as much to imagination as to history,¹⁶ and that “good writing is art and verisimilitude both”; where “the possibilities of truth and invention” are woven together.¹⁷ White asserts that while historians limit their representations of history to documented events, fiction writers are free to use literary devices to ‘truthfully’ present possible events¹⁸ based on their “speculative insights”¹⁹ and historical research. Realistic historical fiction can provide a “fully recognizable...realistic image” of the past including the realm of possibilities of what could have occurred alongside documented events.²⁰ Hatcher suggests that if historians use “style, imagination and straightforward invention from the craft of fiction” history can be made “more attractive and accessible to the public” while enhancing their “knowledge and understanding of the past.”²¹ By blending historical facts and details with story, by carving out the authentic from invention,²² historical fiction can become a living phenomenon for the reader.

Australian author Kate Grenville, asserts that writers explore the world around them, including history, and tweak what they see to tell stories.²³ Fictional writing is not hampered by the constraints of history’s discipline, writers²⁴ have more freedom “to play with history’s traces.”²⁵ They are free to use creativity and imagination to fill the gaps and holes in historical records; importantly, however, factual errors can jolt the reader from the story and destroy the narrative’s credibility.²⁶ Such tweaking gives rise to some historians asserting that historical fiction blurs the line between fact and fiction and that such blurring is troubling.²⁷ David Hackett Fischer for instance, argues that Scott compromised “historical precision to the demands of character and plot” in his historical novel.²⁸ Hatcher, however, argues that those

¹⁶ McCann, 2017, 26.

¹⁷ McCann, 2017, 30.

¹⁸ White, 2005, 148.

¹⁹ Hatcher, 2012, 13.

²⁰ White, 2005, 148.

²¹ Hatcher, 2012, 7.

²² McCann, 2017, 30.

²³ Grenville, Kate. “The Question of History: Response.” *Quarterly Essay*, no. 25, 72.

²⁴ I acknowledge that historians are writers, however when I refer to the writer I am referring to the writer of fiction.

²⁵ Healy, Alice. “When ‘History Changes Who We Were.’” *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2008, 485.

²⁶ Bickham, 1994, 20.

²⁷ British historian, John Guy asserted that the “blur between fact and fiction is troubling” in reference to Hilary Mantel’s novels about historical figure, Thomas Cromwell. Mantel’s response was that writers “have the authority [and legitimacy] of the imagination” and that history and historical fiction are complementary. Brown, Mark. “Students take Hilary Mantel's Tudor novels as fact, says historian.” *The Guardian*. 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/31/students-take-hilary-mantel-tudor-novels-as-fact-hay-festival> Accessed 29 Sept. 2019.

²⁸ Rieber, 2015, 354.

“who know and respect history” can use the tools of fiction to open up the past and explore neglected areas of history, especially the lives of ordinary people.²⁹

Historians and fictional writers have debated the antithetical relationship between history and fiction at great lengths. White tried to “close the gap” between history and historical fiction with his writing of *Metahistory*.³⁰ He argues that the “affinities” between historical narrative (that which is written by historians) and historical fiction should induce historians to make use of literary conventions as both scientific and poetic approaches are needed to relate history.³¹ Rieber’s response to White’s argument is that the incompatibility between history and historical fiction relates to whether historical fiction is indeed a distinct genre.³² Rieber contends that the problem facing historians is the inclusion of dialogue, characters, actions and events which are not grounded “in verifiable documentary evidence.”³³ This is, of course, not the case for the writer of historical fiction who conjures up such elements with imagination and situates them within an historical context. Historical novelist, Alexander Thom claims that historians point back in time, but writers of historical fiction make the past “now” for the reader³⁴ placing them in the “historical moment, through the vividness of [their] stories.”³⁵

For historical fiction to reflect the past, it is essential that verisimilitude scaffold the story and the writer respect their “obligation to historical truth.”³⁶ Historical fiction is obliged to not mislead the reader³⁷ who expects a “richness of factual information”³⁸ and may read historical fiction as much for story as for historical fact. Therefore, “the treatment of the physical setting, chronology of events, dress, customs, and social relations” should be consistent with history. Ideally, treatment of historical context should stem from “contemporary evidence,”³⁹ allowing historical fiction (“faithful” to the content of the past) to be read as “true”.⁴⁰ If historical fiction accurately represents the past there is no conflict in the presentation of what is true,⁴¹ and the story can be read as credible, convincing and

²⁹ Hatcher, 2012, 23.

³⁰ Rieber, 2015, 355.

³¹ Rieber, 2015, 355.

³² Rieber, 2015, 356.

³³ Rieber, 2015, 356.

³⁴ Thom, James Alexander. *Once Upon A Time It Was Now: the art and craft of writing historical fiction*. Blue River Press, 2017, 27.

³⁵ Thom, 2017, 28.

³⁶ Thom, 2017, 18.

³⁷ Foster, John, et al. *Australian children’s literature: an exploration of genre and theme*. Charles Sturt University, Riverina, Centre for Information Studies, 1995, 105.

³⁸ Bickham, 1994, 44.

³⁹ Rieber, 2015, 356.

⁴⁰ White, 2005, 149.

⁴¹ White, 2005, 149.

believable. White emphasises, therefore, that there is no incompatibility between history and fiction, and on this point, I wholeheartedly agree. White emphatically states that “art as well as information” is necessary to present historical content to the reader,⁴² because art when coupled with information has the capacity to bring the past vividly to life.

2.2 The Relationship Between Realism and Historical Fiction

In this section, I argue that realism in fiction provides representations of the real world⁴³ as imagined by the writer.⁴⁴ Such representations in historical fiction are “broadly consistent with historical fact as known and mediated by the contemporary historical consciousness.”⁴⁵ Literary critic David Lodge marries fiction and realism, arguing that “realism is the art of creating an illusion of reality.”⁴⁶ Lodge’s view that realistic fiction is an imitation or an illusion of reality aligns with White who maintains that historical fiction is the intersection between what an informed writer imagines could have happened and the known historical facts.⁴⁷ White agrees with Lodge’s argument that realism in historical fiction should “approximate[s] closely to descriptions of similar experience in non-literary texts of the same culture.”⁴⁸ Harry Shaw in *The Forms of Historical Fiction* argues that realistic historical fiction “is characterized by the mode of knowledge it embodies.”⁴⁹ Although readers accept the illusion of fiction because fiction is a “form of play,”⁵⁰ realistic fiction uses elements of the minutiae of life (drawn from historical sources) to give historical fiction authenticity and to persuade the reader of its verisimilitude. The minutiae of life which forms part of setting is discussed in the following section.

Realism is of particular value in historical fiction because it gives the reader an ‘angle of vision’ into the past. Scholes and Kellogg argue that realism is a powerful tool⁵¹ that provides a ‘rich’ fiction experience and can help the reader “perceive and comprehend the world of reality more sharply and more sensitively”⁵² than they usually would. This generally happens

⁴² White, 2005, 149.

⁴³ Foster, T C, 2009, 39.

⁴⁴ Lodge, 1995, 5.

⁴⁵ Lodge, David. *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature*. Edward Arnold, 1977, 25.

⁴⁶ Lodge, 1977, 25.

⁴⁷ White, 2005, 147.

⁴⁸ Lodge, 1977, 25.

⁴⁹ Shaw, Harry E. *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*. Cornell University Press, 1983, 27.

⁵⁰ Smiley, Jane. *13 Ways of Looking at the Novel*. Faber and Faber, 2006, 93.

⁵¹ Scholes, Robert and Kellogg, Robert. “The Problem of Reality: Illustration and Representation.” *The Theory of the Novel*, edited by Philip Stevick, Philip, The Free Press, 1967, 374.

⁵² Scholes, Robert and Kellogg, Robert, 383.

when the reader relates to a character within a story. Mieke Bal in *Narratology* writes that characters are constructed to resemble real people.⁵³ Characters (in historical fiction who are not based on historical figures) are the writer's speculation about the kinds of people who may have lived in the time period. For Rieber such imagined characters should "conform to contemporary social types in thought and behaviour," and that clues for such social types can be found in the literature of the day.⁵⁴ He explains that historical fact can be taken from sources including "belles lettres,⁵⁵ letters, memoirs, travellers' accounts, court records, newspapers, monuments, images, and artefacts", as well as specific physical locations and other such source material.⁵⁶ Bal contends that the time and place in realistic writing should "resemble the actual world" and that in doing so the events within a story will "become plausible"⁵⁷ and convincing for the reader. Authenticating realistic writing with "closely observed details"⁵⁸ or "proofs"⁵⁹ throughout the story persuades the reader. Jack Ketch, who hangs Martha Rendell, provides specific details of the execution procedure to convince the reader of the authenticity of his account: "Afore eight o'clock I moved the woman o'er the trapdoor. My footsteps were loud on the wooden floor. I drew a hood over her head and bent to pinion her legs with leather ankle straps."⁶⁰ Verisimilitude in realistic writing convinces the reader of the story's authenticity,⁶¹ and enables it to both enrich and enlarge the reader's "knowledge and understanding of the world."⁶² Proofs peppered throughout historical fiction help the setting to ring true.

2.3 Setting Within Historical Fiction

In this section, I explain the meaning of setting as it relates to historical fiction. Setting and its landscape provides the narrative framework for historical fiction. The term "heteroglossia," borrowed from the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, gives setting its widest meaning to include the "social, historical, meteorological, [and] physiological" conditions in "any given time, in any given place."⁶³ Setting is where story takes place and furnishes the

⁵³ Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 2nd ed., University of Toronto Press, 1997, 115.

⁵⁴ Rieber, 2015, 356.

⁵⁵ The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary 3rd ed. gives a definition of belles lettres as "writings or studies of a literary nature esp. essays and criticisms."

⁵⁶ Rieber, 2015, 356.

⁵⁷ Bal, 1997, 141.

⁵⁸ Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction: notes on craft for young writers*. Vintage Books, 1983, 26.

⁵⁹ Gardner refers to proof as "authenticating details" (1983, 25).

⁶⁰ Jack Ketch's account of Martha Rendell's execution is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 27.

⁶¹ Gardner, 1983, 26.

⁶² Lodge, 1995, 10.

⁶³ Bakhtin, M. M. and Holquist, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, 1981, 428.

framework for historical fiction providing a vital layer of meaning for readers. Jeremiah in *The Use of Place in Writing and Literature* asserts that such a framework “serves a function in that it puts the reader where the writer intends him or her to be mentally, and this information gives the reader some insight into the history, the terrain, the people, the customs of a community, and so forth.”⁶⁴ Elizabeth George in *Write Away: one novelist’s approach to fiction and the writing life* asserts that when the writer uses details of setting to their best advantage the landscape of setting is brought to life for the reader.⁶⁵ Setting for Janet Burroway in *Imaginative Writing: the elements of craft* “is part and parcel of the significant, it is heritage and culture, it is identity or exile. And the writer’s choice of detail directs our understanding and our experience of it.”⁶⁶ Setting is often a starting point for fiction because it contributes to the larger meaning of what the writer intends to convey,⁶⁷ imparting “both information and emotion.”⁶⁸ It is also where the story’s events and action play out. In the following subsections, I give an overview of the main elements of setting: place, social and historical conditions, weather and the minutiae of life.

2.3.1 Place

The writer creates the storyworld because “nothing happens nowhere”⁶⁹ and because a backdrop for the dramatic events of the story is required. According to Abrams a story’s place can invoke atmosphere, tone and mood.⁷⁰ When locations are “given distinct characteristics” they can be “transformed into specific places,”⁷¹ and thus represent psychological, ideological and moral positions⁷² that can be used symbolically and metaphorically within the story.

Setting is often the first thing registered in real life and helps to orientate the reader within the storyworld.⁷³ Description of the physical details of setting aids the reader in connecting with the story both intellectually and emotionally, and engaging in “a kind of dream, a rich and vivid play in the mind.”⁷⁴ The historical fiction writer recreates the setting to

⁶⁴ Jeremiah, Milford A. “The Use of Place in Writing and Literature.” *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, vol. 16, no. 2., 2000, 25.

⁶⁵ George, Elizabeth. *Write Away: one novelist’s approach to fiction and the writing life*. Hodder, 2004. 30.

⁶⁶ Burroway, Janet. *Imaginative Writing: the elements of craft*. Pearson, 2015, 136.

⁶⁷ Jeremiah, 2000, 23.

⁶⁸ Burroway, Janet. *Writing Fiction: a guide to narrative craft*, 10th ed. The University of Chicago Press, 2019, 101.

⁶⁹ Burroway, 2015, 145.

⁷⁰ Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 3rd ed., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, 157.

⁷¹ Bal, 1997, 8.

⁷² Bal, 1997, 216.

⁷³ Burroway, 2015, 141.

⁷⁴ Gardner, 1983, 30.

create a well-constructed and plausible storyworld, made vivid by the reader experiencing the “concrete, physical setting through the senses of the characters.”⁷⁵ Stories that appeal to the reader’s senses bring “the pulse of the moment”⁷⁶ to life. Setting is concerned with “everything that supports and impinges” the way characters live. The way they relate to their surroundings “define both space and time, and reveal much more.”⁷⁷ It is an important tool that the writer can use to communicate with the reader especially on a metaphoric (“...she took her last breath in one gasp like a fish who knew he was a goner”⁷⁸) or symbolic level (“Mrs Lewis’s rose bushes were heavy with blooms and white petals lay scattered across the path as if in readiness for death”⁷⁹).

The landscape of historical fiction is a panorama, it is the broad brushstrokes of setting⁸⁰ to provide a “total place experience” for the reader.⁸¹ “Heavy doses of setting minutiae”⁸² such as specific, concrete and accurate details including street names and genuine landmarks⁸³ provide the reader with fine details as discussed further in subsection 2.3.4. To ensure descriptions and events are credible it can be beneficial for the writer to visit the geographic location where the story events play out.⁸⁴ Such research can help stimulate the writer’s imagination⁸⁵ and physical sensory descriptions “stimulate the reader’s senses.”⁸⁶ The reader will fill gaps in description⁸⁷ — sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touch — as part of their reading and decoding of the story.⁸⁸ For Foster a visceral reading is enriched when sensory details are experienced through the character’s eyes and the story’s surroundings are experienced through the reader’s own imagination.⁸⁹

Characters have internal and external landscapes. George explains that landscape can be applied to characters; the way a character looks and the way they operate in their environment makes up their external landscape which has the capacity to imprint on the

⁷⁵ Bickham, 1994, 48.

⁷⁶ McCann, 2017, 37.

⁷⁷ Burroway, 2015, 138.

⁷⁸ This metaphor is taken from Jack Ketch’s account of Martha Rendell’s execution included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 27.

⁷⁹ The symbolism of the scattered flower petals used in the funeral practices of the time is taken from Bessie Donaldson’s account of Martha Rendell’s last morning included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 24.

⁸⁰ Bickham, 1994, 44.

⁸¹ George, 2004, 35.

⁸² Bickham, 1994, 44.

⁸³ Foster, 2009, 40.

⁸⁴ Rieber, 2015, 362.

⁸⁵ Bickham, 1994, 6.

⁸⁶ George, 2004, 38.

⁸⁷ Bickham, 1994, 23.

⁸⁸ Burroway, 2019, 23.

⁸⁹ Bickham, 1994, 4.

reader's mind.⁹⁰ Place will affect the character's use of language.⁹¹ A character's internal landscape is what occurs within a character's mind; their emotions, reflections, needs and wants.⁹² The writer can show the external and internal landscapes of a character through the use of "specific and telling details,"⁹³ and by using setting as place to imbue meaning. Setting illuminates character by revealing character's costumes and belongings, and the environment in which they live and work.⁹⁴ The young prison wardress Bessie Donaldson who tends to Martha Rendell, affords the reader insights about the historical context through her costume, the room in which she sleeps, her toilette routine and her superstitions.⁹⁵ Such details help the reader to become immersed within the storyworld.

Setting as place affects and forms characters.⁹⁶ Burroway explains that character "is a product of place and culture" and when the reader understands the environment in which a character operates they will understand the significance of the character's actions within the drama of the story.⁹⁷ Changes in setting affect characters in the storyworld. The living conditions of Martha Rendell and the Morris family directly impacted their lives; a lack of sanitation and limited supplies of clean drinking water had significant repercussions upon their health. It is this relationship between the setting and characters which helps drive the events of the story forward.

Setting at a bare minimum is a practical consideration because situating characters in place provides a location within which they act out the drama of a story.⁹⁸ It serves as more than a backdrop because through its use as a literary device the writer conveys meaning to the reader (including atmosphere, mood and tone). In historical fiction, setting plays a significant role because it gives the reader much of the historical context of the story.

2.3.2 Social and Historical Conditions

The historical fiction writer uses knowledge of the time, imagination and creativity to represent a particular period. The writer recreates social and historical conditions in which a story is set to inform the reader about the type of society in which the characters live. Elements

⁹⁰ George, 2004, 39.

⁹¹ McCann, 2017, 49.

⁹² George, 2004, 41.

⁹³ George, 2004, 39.

⁹⁴ George, 2004, 24.

⁹⁵ Bessie Donaldson's account of Martha Rendell's last morning is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 24.

⁹⁶ Bickham, 1994, 73.

⁹⁷ Burroway, 2019, 102.

⁹⁸ Bland, D. S. "Endangering the Reader's Neck: Background Description in the Novel." *The Theory of the Novel*, edited by Philip Stevick, The Free Press, 1967, 316.

such as class, gender, the prevailing attitudes to child rearing,⁹⁹ and the economic and political structures within the society give the reader windows into the time period. By understanding the difficulties faced by people of the past — for instance, the problem of drainage and sanitation in East Perth where Martha Rendell lived during the early 1900s — the reader is prompted to empathise with the character’s plight. Details of the cultural and social mores, values and beliefs help the reader to situate characters within the social hierarchy and develop an understanding of the daily issues people faced in that period.

Anne Scott MacLeod argues that representing ‘real’ social conditions in historical fiction is important because historical revisionism (reinterpretation of historical events from differing perspectives) has passed into historical fiction and, often “evades the common realities of the societies” written about.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, historical fiction can mislead the reader about the social and historical conditions of the time. MacLeod points to a number of examples where historical fiction is written to “play to modern sensibilities” and where characters experience their own times from an “alien perspective” and view “racism, sexism, religious bigotry, and outmoded belief as outsiders.”¹⁰¹ MacLeod argues that if historical fiction writers give their protagonists modern sensibilities, they are missing the chance to reflect the time period in its ‘true’ sense. Shaw refers to viewing history in its ‘true’ sense as recognising “the past as past.”¹⁰² Edith Fairgrove’s letter to her cousin provides the reader with a well-to-do socialite’s perspective of Martha Rendell’s trial offering a contrasting viewpoint, to that of Bessie Donaldson, the young prison wardress. Edith’s letter illuminates the idealised notions of femininity of the time.¹⁰³ Historical fiction has the opportunity to fill the gaps between historical records. However, speculation should be based on sound research and include historical detail to accurately reflect the social attitudes of the time.

Rieber uses R.G. Collingwood’s link between the historical detective novel and historians in their roles as detectives to suggest that writing history (and historical fiction) is like spinning “a web of imaginative construction” linking historical and implied facts which the historian (and the writer of historical fiction) has interpreted from source material.¹⁰⁴ According to White, writers of historical fiction can avoid confusing the reader if they clarify what is ‘history’ (what is taken from historical documents such as government and church

⁹⁹ Thom, 2017, 111.

¹⁰⁰ MacLeod, Anne Scott. “Writing Backward: Modern Models in Historical Fiction.” *The Horn Book Magazine*, vol. 74, no. 1, 1998, 26.

¹⁰¹ MacLeod, 1998, 31.

¹⁰² Shaw, 1983, 26.

¹⁰³ Edith Fairgrove’s letter is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Rieber, 2015, 357.

records of the time), and what is “imaginative fiction.”¹⁰⁵ Writers of historical fiction use literary techniques of character, plot, description, dialogue and so forth, to bring “history to life,”¹⁰⁶ and by using historical sources their stories become authentic and credible in their treatment of historical figures and events, and the time period in which their stories are situated. Dean Rehberger in his writing about the neglect of historical fiction as a genre, quotes Herbert Butterfield who argued that historical narrative appeals to historians while historical fiction has a much broader appeal because it “fuses the past into a picture, and makes it live.”¹⁰⁷ In the form of historical fiction, history attracts a broader audience¹⁰⁸ than just the world of academia and research. The blending of history with fiction can ensure the public’s appetite for history is kept alive.¹⁰⁹

2.3.3 Weather Conditions

Weather can be used by the writer to “powerful effect[s], without which fiction would be much the poorer.”¹¹⁰ Forster cites a classification system of novels based on weather, although the worth of such classification is debateable, the broad range of roles demonstrates the breadth of weather’s usefulness in fiction: it can be decorative; utilitarian; illustrative; provide an emotional contrast; be determinative of action; be a controlling influence; be itself a hero or character; or be non-existent.¹¹¹ The use of real weather events and climate extremes can orientate readers within time, as well as providing tone, mood or atmosphere for a scene or description. Bakhtin included meteorological phenomena in his description of heteroglossia because it adds to the appearance of real life. Weather can be used for dramatic effect in narrative; it can evoke atmosphere or mood, be used symbolically and metaphorically, and project “human emotions onto phenomena in the natural world.”¹¹²

Weather is often a trigger for “pathetic fallacy” which John Ruskin described as ascribing human emotions to the natural world.¹¹³ Bessie Donaldson is offended by “the unseeing sun” who painted the sky in “such pretty colours” despite the heaviness of her own

¹⁰⁵ White, 2005, 153.

¹⁰⁶ White, 2005, 153.

¹⁰⁷ Rehberger, Dean. “Vulgar fiction, impure history: The neglect of historical fiction.” *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 18, iss. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Rieber, 2015, 360.

¹⁰⁹ Hatcher, 2012, 3 & 4.

¹¹⁰ Lodge, 1995, 85.

¹¹¹ Forster, E.M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1974, 10.

¹¹² Lodge, 1995, 85.

¹¹³ Lodge, 1995, 85.

heart.¹¹⁴ Bessie expects the sun to be sympathetic to her mood, an example of Ruskin’s pathetic fallacy.

Weather affects the way people live in reality, and so too impacts the lives of characters in historical fiction. In Martha Rendell’s Perth, the year was divided “into a wet season of seven months from April to October, and a dry season of five months from November to March,” with most of the rain falling “during the seven cooler months of the year.”¹¹⁵ During the dry season especially, access to clean, safe water was a major concern for Perth residents in the early twentieth century. Without access to steady water supplies, sanitation suffered. Main sewer drains ran through working-class neighbourhoods and outbreaks of typhoid were common.¹¹⁶ People collected water from wells or water carts, and their health and well-being suffered from water supply contamination “from cesspits into the wells”¹¹⁷ as many people obtained their water from backyard wells which were only metres from the household cesspit.¹¹⁸ During the hot weather, ventilation in housing was a priority and sleeping on verandas was common practice. Clothing was ill-suited to the climate; many women wore corsets and constrictive undergarments and were often covered from their necks to their toes in heavy clothing. Weather affected how people lived their lives, it impacted their daily routines. Inclusion of specific sensory details about the weather can aid in reader engagement and immersion. Weather within historical fiction provides setting with authenticity and can provide an additional layer of meaning.

2.3.4 Minutiae of Life

Setting within historical fiction can open a ‘real’ window into the past when minute details of everyday life for ordinary people are included within the storyworld. Such fiction “should honour the struggles and suffering, but also the joy and the love and everyday small moments”¹¹⁹ of the people who lived through history. Enrique Lima explains that “housing, clothing, food, manners, [commerce, transport, music, art, the state of literacy, superstitions,

¹¹⁴ Bessie Donaldson’s account of Martha Rendell’s last morning is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 24.

¹¹⁵ British Association, Western Australian Committees. *Handbook and Guide to Western Australia*. Fred W.M. Simpson Government Printer, 1914, 28.

¹¹⁶ Stannage, 1979, 253.

¹¹⁷ Hunt, Su-Jane, and Bolton, Geoffrey. “Cleansing the Dughill: water supply and sanitation in Perth 1878 – 1912.” *Studies in Western Australian History II*. University of Western Australia, 1978, 3.

¹¹⁸ Gregory and Gothard, 2009, 679.

¹¹⁹ Asserted by Angela Meyer (the publisher of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris, 2018) as reported by Harari, Fiona. “Writing The Past.” *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 28 September 2019, 16.

religious beliefs, and war^{120]} are the basic elements of the everyday”¹²¹ and play a “central role in the making of society.”¹²² The minutiae of life helps the reader inhabit the storyworld because it is the happenings of daily life; it is what people eat, where they sleep, how they dress, how they work and spend their leisure time, it is how they relate and interact with each other, and is concerned with those who hold power within the society. The sum of these happenings and more is how society and its people operate in the everyday. Lima writes that the routines of everyday can embody the movement of history: “The deliberate, incremental changes over time that are contained in the features of the everyday are as much a part of the historical nature of human experience as the calamities and triumphs we associate with history.”¹²³ By including Lima’s ‘features of the everyday’, which I define as the minutiae of life, within historical fiction the historical context of the time is illuminated for the reader.

Ronald writes that providing specific visual details helps the reader to “imaginatively construct” the setting of the narrative¹²⁴ and works to flesh out characterization, aid plotting and provide a layer of meaning for the reader.¹²⁵ Seemingly insignificant details of the minutiae incarnate the time’s milieu and upon closer examination hold greater meaning. Jack Ketch, the hangman tells us that Rendell’s hands were secured by “leather shackles.”¹²⁶ The use of leather shackles is significant as a form of control, not only of the condemned prisoner, but also for the prison inmates.¹²⁷ The past is different and unfamiliar and the use of specific visual details helps guide the reader through the milieu to inhabit the past¹²⁸ of the storyworld.

The inclusion of detail in fiction is similar to landscape painting because the writer attempts to paint a picture with words.¹²⁹ Bland discusses this practice in terms of localization, which he defines as “placing characters in an environment within which they can act out their

¹²⁰ Thom, 2017, 159.

¹²¹ Lima, Enrique. “Willa Cather’s Rewriting of the Historical Novel in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.” *Novel*, vol. 46, no. 2., 2013, 181. doi: <https://doi-org.libproxy.murdoch.edu.au/10.1215/00295132-2088094> Accessed 29 Aug. 2019.

¹²² Lima, 2013, 182.

¹²³ Lima, 2013, 183.

¹²⁴ Ronald, Ann. *Functions of setting in the novel: from Mrs. Radcliffe to Charles Dickens*. Arno Press, 1980, 1.

¹²⁵ Ronald, 1980, 4-5.

¹²⁶ Jack Ketch’s account of Martha Rendell’s execution is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 27.

¹²⁷ Leather shackles were used at the time of Martha Rendell’s execution rather than ‘irons’. The sounds of the gaol blacksmith striking the irons from a condemned prisoner would signal to the other prisoners that the final moments of the condemned were at hand, and the prisoners would have reacted by making noise (“Irons and Disguise”, *The Daily News*, Tues July 7, 1903, 1). The leather shackles did away with all noise and were thus a form of controlling the condemned and the other prisoners. “The public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested.” (Foucault, Michael. *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison*. Penguin Books, 1991, 47).

¹²⁸ Thom, 2017, 154.

¹²⁹ Bland, 1967, 313-331.

stories.”¹³⁰ He argues “detail and colour...help[s] to present character and situation,”¹³¹ which together work to provide a rich and textured experience for the reader. Such “vivid detail [that] is the lifeblood of fiction”¹³² and historical fiction.

The minutiae imbues the atmosphere, tone and mood of a narrative.¹³³ The writer provides particulars of place, time, weather and the everyday to create mood and atmosphere, reveal characters and advance the storyline.¹³⁴ Specific visual details assist the reader to build a picture of the time, and concrete sensory details help evoke an emotional response.¹³⁵ Specific details of the minutiae within historical fiction provides a richness in texture within the storyworld while at the same time providing a realistic representation of the past.

2.4 Conclusion

The writer of historical fiction uses ‘true’ and accurate details within the story’s setting to bring the time period to life. Setting in historical fiction is the history of a place and its people; it is the customs of those people and the way they interact with their landscape; it acts as the machinery of the story.¹³⁶ As a literary device, setting and the inclusion of specific and concrete details can encourage the reader’s immersion within the story. When the reader deciphers and decodes visual and sensory details their engagement with the storyworld is enhanced.¹³⁷

In historical fiction, the minutiae of everyday life can evoke the reader’s senses and imagination and immerse them within the time of the story; for it is the writer’s duty “to make the reader see and hear.”¹³⁸ The heteroglossia of the time imbues setting with ‘true’ details about place, weather conditions, social and historical conditions effectively opening a window into the past which Hatcher asserts can make history come alive for the reader.¹³⁹ With the setting in place and the storyworld thus vivid in the reader’s eye, the point of view of one or more characters transforms the story into a ‘real’ world within which human history unfolds and a window into the past is opened. The narrative devices of both setting and point of view allows the reader to view the past made real in historical fiction from ‘angles of vision’ perhaps

¹³⁰ Bland, 1967, 316.

¹³¹ Bland, 1967, 328.

¹³² Gardner, 1983, 26.

¹³³ Ronald, 1980, 3.

¹³⁴ Burroway, 2015, 139.

¹³⁵ Jeremiah, 2000, 26.

¹³⁶ Burroway, 2015, 139.

¹³⁷ Logan, Nikki. *The Chemistry of Reading: arousing your reader*. 2012, ebook, loc 989.

¹³⁸ McCann, 2017, 22.

¹³⁹ Hatcher, 2012, 3.

absent from official history thus enabling the reader to grow their understanding of past events and empathy towards historical figures.

Chapter Three

Point of View

This chapter discusses how the writer uses the literary device of point of view to shape the framework of a narrative to give the reader a picture of the storyworld. Point of view can also be used to position the reader so they view the storyworld, characters, and dramatic events in a particular way. Who tells the story shapes how the reader views the events of historical fiction and the writer uses a narrator/s to perform the storytelling. For Forster, “the speciality of the novel is that the writer” can tell the reader about the characters or the writer “can arrange for us to listen when the[y] characters talk to themselves.”¹ Stories can be told in many ways because different narrators experience and see the events that make up a story in various ways.² Who tells the story will influence what happens, where it happens and why.³ The writer chooses a narrator/s to present the point of view which best serves the needs of the story and convinces the reader that the illusion of the story holds true. This chapter explains the role of the narrator, defines point of view, explains how the collaborative relationship between reader and narrator influences the telling of the story, and how authorial distance impacts this relationship. The various viewpoints from which the narrator can tell a story are outlined along with the merits and limitations of each viewpoint. Point of view as a tool can help the writer to achieve the narrative strategy of the work. For historical fiction, the position of the point of view can help to broaden the reader’s understanding of the past while also providing the reader with a space from which to reflect on historical events and figures. I draw on the vignettes in Chapter One to demonstrate these ideas.

3.1 The Narrator

“The narrator tells the story”⁴ — their own or that of others⁵ — and is the ‘person’ who speaks from their ‘angle of vision’. It is useful to note the distinction between the narrator and the author of the work. Booth referred to the implied author as the person behind the scenes

¹ Forster, 1974, 82.

² Peck, John., and Coyle, Martin. *Literary Terms and Criticism*. 3rd ed., Palgrave macmillan, 2002, 123.

³ McCann, 2017, 48.

⁴ Peck, John., and Coyle, Martin. 2002, 123.

⁵ Burroway, 2019, 161.

“distinct” from the real person of the author, the implied author is the author’s ‘second self’.⁶ Taking this distinction into account, narrators can be personified, and “recognised by the reader as a distinct person with well-defined human characteristics”; they can be an anonymous storyteller; or “not fully comparable with any human perspective.”⁷ If personified, the narrator can be “intra-fictional” and play a part in the story’s events.⁸ Such narrators can be central or peripheral; the first is central to the action of the story and the latter, the peripheral narrator, stands to the side of the action as an observer.⁹ Hawthorn explains that when narrators are not given personal qualities, the reader will assume they are not unusual and readily identify with them.¹⁰ An “extra-fictional narrator” is merely the storyteller with “no personal involvement in or relationship” to the story and its dramatic action.¹¹ The narrator’s success in engaging the reader depends upon their “precise degree of reliability, privilege, freedom to comment.”¹² The following section discusses these latter three points in relation to the narrator and how such elements encourage reader immersion and engagement.

3.1.1 Narrator Reliability

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth explains that a narrator’s reliability determines whether or not a reader can trust their account. For Booth, a reliable narrator is one who acts or speaks “in accordance with the norms of the work” and implied author.¹³ A reliable narrator speaks to the reader with ‘the voice of common sense’ allowing an easy relationship to develop. An unreliable narrator, in contrast, is “potentially deceptive,”¹⁴ and in response the reader questions their motives and the facts they provide.¹⁵ An unreliable narrator generates irony and develops “a secret communion” between the implied author and reader.¹⁶ Lodge asserts that unreliable narrators can reveal gaps “between appearance and reality” to show how real people “distort and conceal” it.¹⁷ If the reader decides the narrator is unreliable, they may discover

⁶ Booth, Wayne C. “Distance and Point of View: an essay in classification.” *The Theory of the Novel*. Edited by Philip Stevick, The Free Press, 1967, 92.

⁷ Hawthorn, 1997, 87.

⁸ Hawthorn, 1997, 91.

⁹ Burroway, 2019, 160.

¹⁰ Hawthorn, 1997, 97.

¹¹ Hawthorn, 1997, 91.

¹² Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed., The University of Chicago Press, 1961, 164.

¹³ Booth, 1961, 151.

¹⁴ Booth, 1961, 159.

¹⁵ Anderson, Timothy Kent. *I Know Who I Am: Self-Constitution and the Unreliable Narrator*. Diss. 2016, 5.

¹⁶ Shen, Dan: "Unreliability", Paragraph 2. In: Hühn, Peter et al. (eds.): *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University. URL = <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/unreliability>
Accessed 12 Feb. 2019.

¹⁷ Lodge, 1995, 155.

different layers of meaning within the text.¹⁸ Narrators who appear unreliable (such as autobiographers) may distort ‘objective truth’.¹⁹ Inadvertent narrator unreliability may result from narrators assuming “false impressions of themselves”²⁰ or attempting to present a ‘better’ view of who they are. There may be an element of unreliability in all narrators because all narrators are based on real people. McCann argues that all first-person narrators are “essentially unreliable”.²¹ Narrator reliability affects the reader’s relationship with the story because the reader will react differently to the narrative if they suspect the narrator is untrustworthy.

3.1.2 Narrator Privilege

The type of narrator — omniscient, objective, third-, second- or first-person — determines their access to information within the story, including whether they know other characters’ thoughts. A narrator with complete privilege is omniscient and knows all the facts of a story,²² they are free to roam within the storyworld, and can be in multiple places simultaneously.²³ Such narrators have the ability to “shift from character to character.”²⁴ They are godlike because they “can go anywhere, do anything, know everything.”²⁵ Third-person omniscient narrators know more than the characters, can know the thoughts and actions of multiple characters, and can be objective or subjective. “An all-knowing narrator” is “brought on board *by* the author to relate or to render” the story’s events.”²⁶ A narrator with limited privilege (such as a first-person narrator) is “limited to realistic vision and inference,”²⁷ and experiences the story’s events from a single viewpoint mimicking the way individuals operate in reality. The views of the narrator do not necessarily correspond with the author’s views or opinions.

3.1.3 Narrator’s Freedom to Comment

Narrators have differing levels of freedom to comment on characters’ actions, motivations and events within the storyworld. The vignettes in Chapter One are told from a first-person perspective offering the reader six differing viewpoints with observations from

¹⁸ Booth, 1967, 100.

¹⁹ Anderson, 2016, 5.

²⁰ Anderson, 2016, 7.

²¹ McCann, 2017, 48.

²² Booth, 1961, 160.

²³ Herman et al, 2005, 423.

²⁴ Abrams, 1971, 134.

²⁵ Grenville, Kate. *The Writing Book: a workbook for fiction writers*. Allen & Unwin, 1990, 62.

²⁶ George, 2004, 95.

²⁷ Booth, 1961, 160.

each character's 'angle of vision' into the events. Each character is limited to relating their own experiences. As part of a novel, these vignettes may exist within a wider story narrated by an omniscient narrator who can comment on anything within the storyworld.

3.2 Defining Point of View (Viewpoint)

Point of view is about "constructing a picture of the world."²⁸ It is how the writer uses a narrator/s to perform the storytelling; it is the lens used to filter the story. Point of view is "the position or vantage-point from which the events of a story seem to be observed and presented."²⁹ For Abrams, point of view is "the way a story gets told—the perspective or perspectives established by an author through which the reader is presented with characters, actions, setting, and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction."³⁰ Point of view or the viewpoint is the position from which the narrator of the story stands in relation to other characters and the story's dramatic action.³¹ It is affected by the narrator's reliability, privilege and freedom to comment.

The lens used to tell a story is an essential part of a work's scaffold for when a writer embarks upon the telling of a story they first decide which point of view will best serve the story's interests; point of view can illuminate and clarify, or it can falsify and hide elements of the story. In *Understanding Novels*, Foster asserts the writer's decision about point of view will set "the course of the novel."³²

Point of view is concerned with the relationship between narrative and "writer, character and reader"³³ which Janet Burroway in *Writing Fiction: a guide to narrative craft*, describes as "the most complex element of fiction."³⁴ It "structures the social and aesthetic relationships between the narrating subject and the represented fictional world"; it also forms part of the social contract between the reader and the writer.³⁵ Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg in *The Nature of Narrative: revised and expanded* maintain the essence of narrative as an artform

²⁸ Lotman, J. M., and L. M. O'Toole. "Point of View in a Text." *New Literary History*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1975, 341. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/468424. Accessed 6 Sept. 2019.

²⁹ *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2008. www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272 Accessed 23 Jul. 2019.

³⁰ Abrams, 1971, 133.

³¹ George, 2004, 89.

³² Foster, 2009, 45.

³³ Burroway, 2019, 153.

³⁴ Burroway, 2019, 153.

³⁵ Snaider Lanser, Susan. *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*. Princeton University Press, 1981, 58.

lies in this relationship.³⁶ For them, point of view is how the writer controls and shapes narrative to “control the reader’s impression.”³⁷ Foster argues the reader’s relationship with the story is dependent upon narrative voice,³⁸ for who tells the story influences the reader’s relationship to the events and characters.³⁹ Foster’s view concurs with positions held by Burroway, Sniader Lanser, and Scholes, Phelan and Kellogg, and in this regard, I concur.

Point of view should meet the narrative strategy and drive the plot forward. Castellani defines narrative strategy as “the unique philosophy behind the construction of a work of fiction that applies to that work alone,”⁴⁰ and should meet “the particular needs of the work in hand.”⁴¹ Although not readily apparent to the reader, point of view is a critical crafting decision directing the story’s structure and is “part of the entire artistic idea behind the novel.”⁴²

The narrative strategy behind the vignettes in Chapter One is to provide different perspectives about Rendell’s execution. By giving Rendell four vignettes rather than one as the other characters have, I provide the reader with more opportunities to view Rendell’s innermost mind during times of great strain. My aim is to broaden the reader’s view of Rendell as a fully-fleshed human rather than a flat two-dimensional historical figure as provided by official history. I am also attempting to build the reader’s empathy for Rendell’s plight. The use of six characters within the vignettes is an example of what Bakhtin referred to as the incorporation of many voices, “polyphony” or “dialogism” in prose. Bakhtin’s polyphony explains how traces of language from the past are included in the present. Hawthorn explains that different voices “represent and disseminate different points of view, different perspectives.”⁴³

The use of peripheral characters in the telling of the vignettes provides the narrative with a semblance of objectivity which would not be possible if the entire account was presented by one historical figure.⁴⁴ Peripheral characters, living and recounting their own lives, can “broaden the reader’s understanding of the historical event.”⁴⁵ The following quotes from the vignettes further explain:

³⁶ Scholes, Robert, Phelan, James and Kellogg, Robert. *The Nature of Narrative: Revised and Expanded*. Oxford University Press, 2006, 240.

³⁷ Scholes et al, 2006, 275.

³⁸ Foster, 2009, 45.

³⁹ Foster, 2009, 21.

⁴⁰ Castellani, 2016, 18.

⁴¹ Booth, Wayne C. “Distance and Point of View: an essay in classification.” *The Theory of the Novel*. Edited by Philip Stevick, The Free Press, 1967, 90.

⁴² George, 2004, 89.

⁴³ Hawthorn, 1997, 143.

⁴⁴ Thom, 2017, 143.

⁴⁵ Thom, 2017, 144.

“I was one of twenty-five men to witness her execution for which I count myself a fortunate man. Acting as witness bears testimony to my reputation. My hard work and sober character have been rewarded. My new role of Justice of the Peace shall suit me fine.”⁴⁶

Harold Alfred Brown’s recounting of events describes Rendell’s execution as if to increase his own sense of self-importance and to create a favourable impression on the reader.

“The hangman drew the bolt at the first stroke of 8 o’clock. The trapdoor swung open and the body fell into the pit. A blanket covered in sawdust was at the bottom of the pit but it was not needed as there was no blood spilled. At three minutes past the hour, the body swung lifelessly.”

The reader is left with an impression of having gained some insight into Rendell’s execution which was recounted by Brown in a sanitary and detached manner. There is little emotion in his version of events. Peripheral characters as observers are often emotionally detached from the dramatic action of the story.

Historical fiction has genre requirements in relation to point of view; readers of historical fiction expect an on-high omniscient or objective viewpoint to establish the story’s landscape. A long-distance focal lens provides sweeping views across the landscape and setting affording the social and historical conditions of the time.⁴⁷ The following quote from the young prison wardress Bessie Donaldson demonstrates this lens:

“The air is heavy with wood smoke. Each warder’s cottage hunkers down as if they too wish this day was not here, thin ribbons of grey smoke escape from the chimney tops. From the street comes the rattle of carts and carriages as horses pull their loads and ships’ horns blast from the harbour.”⁴⁸

This long-distance lens contrasts with character viewpoints which provide the fine details of daily life⁴⁹ (i.e. the minutiae of daily life discussed in 2.3.4 of Chapter Two). A character’s viewpoint reflecting their outlook and perspective helps the reader to engage with and experience a level of immersion in the story.⁵⁰ Jack Ketch’s account allows the reader to reflect on his profession.⁵¹ The use of such viewpoints helps the setting to “remain very much in

⁴⁶ Harold Alfred Brown’s account of Martha Rendell’s execution is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 18.

⁴⁷ Bickham, 1994, 44

⁴⁸ Bessie Donaldson’s account of the morning of Martha Rendell’s death is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 24.

⁴⁹ Bickham, 1994, 44

⁵⁰ Bickham, 1994, 100

⁵¹ Jack Ketch’s account of Martha Rendell’s execution is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 27.

evidence” for readers of historical fiction where much of “the historic facts and ambience [is]... transmitted.”⁵²

The choice of point of view can be a political expression. As Castellani argues in *The Art of Perspective: who tells the story*, if we believe in the power of stories to change the world then whoever “tells the story occupies the most powerful position of all.”⁵³ Who tells the story influences the way the story is told, and the attitude the reader takes to the narrator.⁵⁴ When the storyteller is a marginalised character or someone ‘despised’ or ‘invisible’ within the societal confines of a story, there are political consequences for both content and reader engagement.⁵⁵ Through such storytelling, the reader may become more empathetic to the narrator and their plight facilitating a reader’s engagement with social issues and ideas they might usually ignore or about which they hold contrary views. Martha Rendell’s⁵⁶ accounts aim to invoke the reader’s sympathy by providing insights into her inner-most mind. The reader sees her confusion and grief; a viewpoint overlooked in the newspapers reporting at the time.

3.3 Choosing a Point of View

The writer chooses a point of view which best serves the needs of the story. Lodge argues choosing a point of view is the most important decision the writer makes “for it fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions.”⁵⁷ The writer uses point of view to position the reader to certain effect such as to increase empathy or disgust. Stories can be told by characters, thus character viewpoints (intra-fictional) as discussed in subsection 3.3.2 or, told from outside character such as the objective viewpoint (extra-fictional) outlined in the following section.

3.3.1 Objective Viewpoint

Unlike an omniscient narrator, an objective viewpoint provides only the facts and “remains outside the characters at all times.”⁵⁸ This extra-fictional viewpoint provides the “least degree of intimacy” with the reader and encourages critical observation of the story, its

⁵² Bickham, 1994, 44

⁵³ Castellani, 2016, 107.

⁵⁴ Hawthorn, 1997, 95.

⁵⁵ Castellani, 2016, 107.

⁵⁶ Martha Rendell’s accounts are included in the vignettes in Chapter One.

⁵⁷ Lodge, 1995, 26.

⁵⁸ George, 2004, 90.

characters and dramatic action.⁵⁹ Such narration can be journalistic.⁶⁰ A journalistic viewpoint is presented by Harold Alfred Brown when he recounts Martha Rendell's execution providing the reader with an almost 'objective' viewpoint.⁶¹ In such narration, there is little room for emotional engagement and the reader is encouraged to view the events with detachment.

3.3.2 Character Viewpoints

Character viewpoints are the 'angle of vision' of one or more of the characters in the story (intra-fictional). Character viewpoints have limited privilege, because characters can only relate events from their own perspectives. They include first-person point of view; third-person point of view; stream of consciousness; and second-person point of view.

A first-person narrator tells the story from personal experience and their own perspective, referring to themselves in the first person.⁶² By directly addressing the reader, a first-person narrator provides an illusion of closeness and intimacy⁶³ helping to increase the reader's emotional investment and immersion within the story. The first-person narrator or 'I' narrator⁶⁴ is the main protagonist or narrator at the centre of the action within the story⁶⁵ (central narrator). A minor character or an observer who does not take part in the action is a peripheral narrator⁶⁶ describing the story's events from a 'safe distance.' A first-person narrator speaking from an anonymous position is often equated with 'the voice of truth' for the information and judgement presented.⁶⁷

A narrator operating from the first-person viewpoint experiences the same limitations as a real person; they cannot be omniscient and are limited to reporting only what they could realistically know or infer.⁶⁸ The 'I' narrator is "filtered through the consciousness of the 'I'"⁶⁹ and while knowing their own mind, they cannot know the thoughts of other characters. The first-person narrator carries their own prejudices and character traits which influences the storytelling, and as such, may provide incomplete information and cause the narrator to make questionable judgements.

⁵⁹ George, 2004, 94.

⁶⁰ George, 2004, 90.

⁶¹ Harold Alfred Brown's account of Martha Rendell's execution is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 18.

⁶² Herman et al, 2005, 173.

⁶³ Castellani, 2016, 31. Foster, 2009, 51.

⁶⁴ Grenville, 1990, 60.

⁶⁵ Burroway, 2019, 159.

⁶⁶ Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2011. 87.

⁶⁷ Herman et al, 2005, 422.

⁶⁸ Burroway, 2019, 162.

⁶⁹ Grenville, 1990, 60.

First-person point of view runs the risk of reader disengagement if the reader is unable to relate to or understand the narrator. Foster explains a risk associated with ‘I’ narration is that such narrators can be unreliable because they are representations of real people (who lie and misremember): “If persons in the real world have a tenuous connection to veracity, why should we expect those in made-up stories to be more truthful?”⁷⁰

A first-person viewpoint can create the illusion the story’s events are taking place in the present.⁷¹ Mendilow argues the ‘illusion of immediacy’ causes the reader to feel they are participating within the story’s action and will consequently “yield to the illusion”⁷² of the story’s events taking place in real time. For Mendilow the illusion of immediacy created by ‘I’ narrators is effective because it mimics the way people behave in reality.⁷³

Points of view can shift within a story. Forster argues the writer is free to shift the viewpoint “if it comes off” or otherwise, when the shifting viewpoint is convincing for the reader.⁷⁴ For Forster, shifting points of view “is one of the great advantages of the novel-form.”⁷⁵ Shifting first-person point of view is a style of narration where at least two first-person narrators alternate the storytelling.⁷⁶ The same event can be represented by two or more narrators offering different perspectives on the dramatic action of the story. This narration style was used in the vignettes and provided multiple ‘angles of vision’ into the events around the execution of Martha Rendell.

Third-person point of view has “the greatest range of effects, from total objectivity to great intimacy.”⁷⁷ A third-person narrator is external to the action and as such “all pronominal references to the characters are restricted to third-person forms (i.e., he, she, it, they).”⁷⁸ Such a narrator can be omniscient as discussed previously. Subjective third-person narrators⁷⁹ (known as third-person limited) generally identify with one character and provide a “fairly one-sided view of the action.”⁸⁰ From this viewpoint the narrator is external to the story and offers “external hints” into other characters’ “interior lives.”⁸¹

⁷⁰ Foster, 2009, 55.

⁷¹ Foster, 2009, 50.

⁷² Mendilow, A. A. “The Position of the Present in Fiction.” *The Theory of the Novel*, edited by Philip Stevick, The Free Press, 1967. 265.

⁷³ Mendilow, 279.

⁷⁴ Forster, 1974, 78.

⁷⁵ Forster, 1974, 79.

⁷⁶ George, 2004, 102.

⁷⁷ Burroway, Janet. *Imaginative Writing: the elements of craft*. 4th ed., Pearson, 2015. 58

⁷⁸ Herman et al, 2005, 601.

⁷⁹ Smailes, Gary. *The Writing Manual*. Press Books, 2018. <https://writingmanual.pressbooks.com/chapter/types-of-narrative-voice-2/> Accessed 15 Jun. 2019.

⁸⁰ Foster, 2009, 46.

⁸¹ Foster, 2009, 46.

A shifting third-person point of view allows the writer to tell the story from multiple third-person characters. This strategy provides flexibility to show the interior lives of multiple characters to suit the narrative strategy.⁸² A downside to this viewpoint is the effect on pacing; if there are too many characters the pace will slow.⁸³

Stream of consciousness provides insights into the psychology of the human mind by representing “random flow of impressions through a character’s mind.”⁸⁴ This viewpoint “acknowledges how complex and chaotic the human mind”⁸⁵ can be, while at the same time the writer aims to provide meaning and order within the narrative. Stream of consciousness though rarely used for an entire novel can be useful to explore aspects of a character’s thought process especially during a traumatic event.

In second-person point of view, the protagonist and narrator can be identical or different.⁸⁶ The writer designates the reader the role of ‘you’; the reader thus becomes a character within the storyworld.⁸⁷ This point of view may seem ‘unnatural’ given it is strange to tell an individual about their own life events.⁸⁸ For Burroway, second-person point of view draws attention to itself as a narrative technique which may lessen reader engagement and weaken the narrative’s appeal. Second-person point of view is a difficult state for the writer to maintain but allows the reader to imagine themselves directly experiencing the story’s events.⁸⁹

3.4 The Reader

Much of the novel’s appeal comes from the collaborative relationship between the reader and narrator whereby the reader engages with the characters’ stories and becomes “actively involved in the creation of meaning,” bringing “their understanding and imagination to bear on characters”⁹⁰ and the dramatic action of the story. Stories do not exist in isolation⁹¹ and are written for a reader or audience. Herman et al define audience as “any receiver of a text, be it a reader, a viewer, or a listener.”⁹² Every story has “an intended reader, a true reader.”⁹³ While the reader is the intended audience for a story, the teller-listener relationship

⁸² George, 2004, 105.

⁸³ George, 2004, 106.

⁸⁴ Peck et al, 2002, 132.

⁸⁵ Peck et al, 2002, 132.

⁸⁶ Herman et al, 2005, 522.

⁸⁷ Burroway, 2019, 158.

⁸⁸ Herman et al, 2005, 423.

⁸⁹ Burroway, 158 & 159.

⁹⁰ Foster, 2009, xiii & xiv.

⁹¹ McCann, 2017, 52.

⁹² Herman et al, 2005, 29.

⁹³ Atwood, Margaret. *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. Cambridge University Press, 2002. 131.

is not necessarily simple. As Burroway notes the writer “implies an identity” for the “intended audience”⁹⁴ which can take different forms: the reader may “overhear” the story such as in an epistolary novel (the story in the form of letters),⁹⁵ through a monologue (the story is told “by one character to another”),⁹⁶ and when the character relates the story to themselves (through diary entries).⁹⁷ Stream of consciousness and interior monologue are also examples of the reader ‘overhearing’ the story.

The very act of reading is an exercise in decoding.⁹⁸ Reading requires active participation from the reader to interpret the story’s meaning.⁹⁹ Reader interpretation is not neutral¹⁰⁰ as the reader comes to the story with their own life experiences, prejudices and tastes which play a part in the story’s interpretation. The reader’s experience is of no lesser importance than that of the writers’ and the dance between story, writer and reader is what makes the collaborative relationship work.

Every story offers a relationship with the intended audience or reader.¹⁰¹ If the audience relates to the storyteller’s point of view they will likely engage with the story. The writer chooses a narrator who they judge will best connect with the intended audience. When the writer chooses a point of view, they provide the reader with ideas and ways of understanding spoken through the viewpoint presented. Differing points of view impact the narrator’s self-consciousness, the language used, the illusion of closeness and intimacy with the reader, and narrator reliability.¹⁰² Martha Rendell’s accounts present an intimate perspective exposing some of the social and historical conditions under which she lived.¹⁰³ Such accounts of Martha Rendell’s daily deprivations and discomfort serve to encourage the reader’s empathy and to bring the character intimately to life, thus opening up the relationship between the reader and narrator.

The choice of narrator should fit the narrative strategy to effectively communicate and engage with the story’s intended audience. Point of view should be used consistently within the narrative to ensure the illusion of the story is maintained.¹⁰⁴ If the writer goes beyond the

⁹⁴ Burroway, 2019, 162.

⁹⁵ Burroway, 2019, 163.

⁹⁶ Burroway, 2019, 164.

⁹⁷ Burroway, 2019, 165.

⁹⁸ Atwood, 2002, 46.

⁹⁹ Atwood, 2002, 50.

¹⁰⁰ Atwood, 2002, 111.

¹⁰¹ Smiley, 2006, 86.

¹⁰² Burroway, 2019, 167 & 168.

¹⁰³ Martha Rendell’s accounts are included in the vignettes in Chapter One.

¹⁰⁴ Booth, 1967, 89.

set perspective, if for instance, a first-person narrator has access to another character's thoughts, the social contract between the writer and the reader will be broken and the reader will likely disengage. The writer chooses a point of view which will best engage their intended reader and open up a collaborative relationship between the reader, writer and narrator.

3.5 Distance

Variations of distance within the story are related to the distance between the writer, reader, narrator and characters; such distance can be moral, intellectual, spatial or temporal.¹⁰⁵ Authorial distance concerns the degree of intimacy and closeness the reader has with the narrator and characters, and affects the perspective given.¹⁰⁶ There is likely to be some moral distance between the reader and Jack Ketch who hangs Martha Rendell.¹⁰⁷ This distance is curtailed through the use of a first-person narrator to represent the hangman's perspective and facilitate a relationship between the reader and narrator.

Burroway states the use of abstract nouns, summary (concentrated or accelerated reporting of events),¹⁰⁸ and objectivity in telling can increase the distance between story and reader.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, concrete detail, scenes (showing the action or drama of the story) and a character's thoughts can decrease the distance between the story and reader, and increase the reader's sense of closeness to the story.¹¹⁰ The writer can use time, space, tone and irony to manipulate distance in the storyworld.¹¹¹ Choosing and controlling distance within narrative concerns point of view because different points of view necessitate different distances between the narrator and the reader, consequently influencing their collaborative relationship.

3.6 Conclusion

Point of view as a literary device can help the story come alive for the reader. Using point of view to best effect means the writer aligns the narrator to the narrative strategy. Once the point of view has been decided upon, the writer decides who to address, what form best suits the narrative strategy, and how distance can be used to advantage in storytelling. The

¹⁰⁵ Booth, 1961, 157.

¹⁰⁶ McCann, 2017, 50.

¹⁰⁷ Jack Ketch's account of Martha Rendell's execution is included in the vignettes in Chapter One, 27.

¹⁰⁸ Herman et al, 2005, 576.

¹⁰⁹ Burroway, 2019, 169.

¹¹⁰ Burroway, 2019, 170.

¹¹¹ Burroway, 2019, 173.

reader must accept the narrative as convincing if the story is to be effective: “all that matters to the reader is whether the shifting of attitude and secret life are convincing.”¹¹²

This chapter discussed point of view as a literary device. Point of view is a tool the writer employs to best achieve their narrative strategy. It orients the reader towards the story telling and effective use of a narrator can help sustain the illusion of reality for the story. Point of view serves to create a sense of reality in historical fiction, and positions the reader to think and respond to the narrative in a certain way. The writer’s choice of point of view is critical and a central element in the artistic idea underpinning each and every story.

¹¹² Forster, 1974, 82.

Conclusion

Writers of historical fiction face the challenge of providing readers with windows into the past through their stories. The literary devices of setting and point of view can bring historical events into sharper focus for the reader giving them new perspectives of such events. This thesis used a series of vignettes to foreground how setting and point of view can be used within historical fiction to give the reader ‘an angle of vision’ into the execution of Martha Rendell.

Chapter One made up the creative component of the thesis and the series of vignettes titled “A Hanging” provided differing ‘angles of vision’ of Rendell’s execution in 1909. The six points of view ranged from the executioner to the condemned woman and allowed the reader to ‘see’ accounts of the hanging from individuals who are ‘silent’ within the official historical record. Whether a novel incorporating these vignettes is or is not ever written, the story they tell already exists. In the instance of reading, the reader extrapolates details of setting that frame each narrative. The reader has also formed a relationship with each character through the accounts the vignettes have given voice to. Although the vignettes are fiction, their inclusion of specific and concrete details means they are rich in historical content providing the reader with a glimpse into Perth around 1909.

Chapter Two discussed how the use of setting within historical fiction can open a window into the past. The literary device of setting provides the reader with historical facts and ambience making up the social and historical context of the world in which the story is situated. Setting is more than mere backdrop for the dramatic events of the story; it can communicate mood, tone and atmosphere to the reader and be used metaphorically or symbolically. Setting within historical fiction takes on a significant role as it gives the reader much of the historical context of the time period. When the writer of historical fiction uses specific, concrete details from historical sources they open a window into the past. Although writers are free to speculate and imagine in creating historical fiction, they are obliged to not mislead the reader about historical fact and stay true to the spirit of the times. The reader of historical fiction expects the content to be true to the times and where there is significant deviation from historical context and fact, the writer is expected to make some indication within the text, possibly in the notes following the story.

Chapter Three discussed the literary device of point of view and demonstrated its significance in determining the structure and presentation of the story. Point of view is

concerned with telling the story, its believability and relationship with the reader. Historical fiction gives the writer an opportunity to present voices from the past which have been traditionally absent from official historical writing. Point of view is concerned with positioning the reader to open up the collaborative relationship between the reader, the writer and narrator. Stories are written for an intended audience. Historical fiction lives in the space between fiction and history and the writer fills the gaps in history with imagination and speculation. For the reader to accept the reality of the story it must be convincing and believable. Historical fiction rings true when the narrative mimics reality in a credible way.

My journey began with a visit to Fremantle Prison. I was surprised that my research suggested Rendell was not the bloodthirsty villain found if you type 'Martha Rendell' in the Google search bar. I had stumbled across the story of a woman born in the wrong time. At Karrakatta Cemetery I knelt at the graves of Annie, Olive and Arthur Morris and apologised in whispers for the lack of sanitation, clean water and medical supplies of their time. I cried reading *The Coolgardie Miner* that reported the desperate attempts of Reverend Allen and Mr Clydesdale to save Rendell's life. My research into the minutiae of this time as it informs setting showed me how harsh living conditions were for the Morris/Rendell household. Reading newspaper accounts and sensationalist non-fiction crime books such as *Australia's Serial Killers* and *An Australian Murder Almanac* have shown me the importance of point of view in historical fiction. Who tells the story and how their viewpoint positions the reader is paramount in gaining a particular response from an audience. My view of Martha Rendell is vastly different from my first impressions and in writing this thesis I realised that my view of the past has changed. Historical fiction — either in the writing or reading — can influence our understanding and impressions of historical figures and the events through which they lived. Such fiction has the power to enrich stories and truly open an authentic window into the past.

Appendix

The following notes detail historical facts pertaining to the Vignettes on a Hanging in Chapter One.

1.1 Harold Alfred Brown, 7 October 1909

Generally, only a dozen witnesses were present for executions, but for Martha Rendell's execution there were 25 witnesses.

Heritage Today. *Fremantle Prison Collection Significance Assessment*. Oct. 2017.

<https://fremantleprison.com.au/media/1569/sa-2018-website-edit.pdf> Accessed 4 Sept. 2019, 125.

A description of the hanging was reported by the Kalgoorlie Western Argus.

“Execution of Martha Rendell.” Kalgoorlie Western Argus, 12 Oct. 190, 32.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article33295351>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2019.

According to newspaper accounts, Martha Rendell's eyes were bandaged before her execution.

“Execution of A Woman.” Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, 7 Oct.

1909, 5. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article138467311> Accessed 14 May 2019.

“A canvas hood was then placed over their head, followed by the noose. The noose was not formed by a knot, as is often believed, but by a free-running steel eye, which was adjusted to sit under the jaw, with the eye at the back of the neck. When the trap door was opened the condemned would drop, and the noose would cause instantaneous death through fracture of the neck, not by strangulation.”

Heritage Today. *Fremantle Prison Collection Significance Assessment*. Oct. 2017.

<https://fremantleprison.com.au/media/1569/sa-2018-website-edit.pdf> Accessed 4 Sept. 2019, 125.

For most executions at Fremantle Prison, the executioner drew the bolt at the first stroke of eight o'clock.

Heritage Today. *Fremantle Prison Collection Significance Assessment*. Oct. 2017.

<https://fremantleprison.com.au/media/1569/sa-2018-website-edit.pdf> Accessed 4 Sept. 2019, 125.

“On the ground floor beneath the trap was a prison blanket topped with sawdust to soak up the blood in case [the] execution went awry.”

Duff, Xavier. *Noose: True stories of Australians who died at the gallows*. The Five Mile Press, 2014, 127.

1.3 Edith Fairgrove, 9 September 1909

Miasma is defined as “a vaporous exhalation formerly believed to cause disease.” The term first appeared in English in the 1600s.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/miasma> Accessed 14 May 2019.

1.4 Martha Rendell, 16 March 1907

Thomas and Sarah eloped against the wishes of Thomas’s family. Sarah was considered a poor match.

Haebich, 2010, 187.

Thomas Morris was married to Sarah Simmonds in Victoria in 1882.

Haebich, 2010, 184.

Martha suffered from miscarriages and stillbirths. Seven infants born to her mother died.

Haebich, 2010, 179.

The urban environment of East Perth was notorious for being a noxious environment.

Adams, 2009, 210.

Dr Cuthbert was the Morris/Rendell family physician.

Thomas often worked away for weeks at a time in his job as carpenter.

Haebich, 2010, 188.

In 1899 Karrakatta Cemetery was opened and the East Perth Cemetery (the site of St Bartholomew’s Church) was officially designated a ‘Disused Burial Place’.

Oldham, Ray. “The Old East Perth Cemetery, 1829-1988.” *Early Days: journal and proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, vol. 9 no. 6, 1988, 89-97.

1.5 Ruth Allen, 4 October 1909

Ruth’s father is based loosely on Reverend Thomas Allen who was remembered as a courageous and generous man.

Haebich, 2010, 206.

1.6 Martha Rendell, 8 September 1909

Justice McMillan resided over Rendell’s trial in September, 1909.

Adams, 2009, 228.

Crown Solicitor, Mr A E Barker opened the prosecution's case during Rendell's trial.

"A City Sensation." *The West Australian*, 8 Sept. 1909, 5. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article26236957>. Accessed 14 Jul. 2019.

1.7 Bessie Donaldson, 6 October 1909

Horsehair mattresses were commonly used during this time.

"Contracts for the Public Service. Tenders for Horsehair Mattresses and Pillows."

New South Wales Government Gazette, 19 Aug. 1892, Issue No. 585, page 6705.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page13088107>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2019 and "To Clean A Horsehair Mattress." *The Australian Woman's Mirror*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 May 1926, 57. nla.obj-396024296 National Library of Australia. Accessed 25 Feb. 2019.

Fremantle Prison was constructed from limestone.

Fremantle Prison Conservation Management Plan 2010,

<https://fremantleprison.com.au/media/fremantle-prison-cmp-feb-2010-sectn-4.pdf>

Accessed 25 Feb. 2019.

Hot bricks were used to keep warm while sleeping in the cooler months of the year.

"Ladies' Page Domestic Hints." *The Telegraph*, 30 Jun. 1906, 4.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/19394597> Accessed 25 Feb. 2019.

The hanging rope was made from hemp.

"The Hangman." *Truth*, 26 Oct. 1907, 5.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/22622788> Accessed 20 Jun. 2019.

A Victorian custom was to scatter flowers around the corpse in the coffin.

Six crows or ravens signified death.

Wigington, Patti. "The Magic of Crows and Ravens." *Learn Religions*, Jun. 25, 2019, learnreligions.com/the-magic-of-crows-and-ravens-2562511 Accessed 28 Jul. 2019.

1.8 Martha Rendell, 1 October 1909

Dr Cleland and Dr Cumpston performed the post-mortem and autopsies on the Morris children.

Adams, 2009, 223.

Rendell did not permit Dr Cleland to remove biological matter from Arthur Morris's throat or stomach.

Adams, 2009, 223.

1.9 Jack Ketch, 6 October 1909

“The hangman calculated the drop, measured in feet, by dividing 1260 by the condemned man or woman’s body weight, measured in pounds.” (Duff, 2014, 88). *The Particulars of Execution* provides details of executions in Victoria. Executions - Table of Drops (dated 24/03/1904) on the inside covers gives the formula for a successful execution by hanging. Hangings were uncommon, however the hangman complied with the routine and rituals set out by Fremantle Prison. Generally, he would be offered ale before an execution but on the occasion of Rendell’s hanging he was offered spirits.

Rendell’s hands were tied behind her and secured with leather shackles.

From an explanation of capital punishment <https://fremantleprison.com.au/history-heritage/history/the-modern-era/capital-punishment/> Accessed 16 Apr. 2019.

Rendell’s legs were secured at the ankles for her execution.

Heritage Today. *Fremantle Prison Collection Significance Assessment*. Oct. 2017.

<https://fremantleprison.com.au/media/1569/sa-2018-website-edit.pdf> Accessed 4 Sept. 2019, 125.

Positioning the noose was critical to achieve a successful hanging.

Heritage Today. *Fremantle Prison Collection Significance Assessment*. Oct. 2017.

<https://fremantleprison.com.au/media/1569/sa-2018-website-edit.pdf> Accessed 4 Sept. 2019, 125.

The hangman was paid five pounds for each execution.

“The Hangman.” *Truth*, 26 Oct. 1907, 5.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/22622788> Accessed 20 Jun. 2019.

The hangman’s movements and payment were reported by the Truth newspaper.

“The Hanging of Martha Rendell.” *Truth*, 9 Oct. 1909, 6. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article207402944>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

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