Murdoch University

Natalie Kon-yu

Letting go of the truth: researching and writing the other side of silence in women's lives

Abstract
In my paper 'Mixing Memory with the Desire to Forget' given at the Australian Association of Writing Program's annual conference last November, I outlined the difficulties in writing about the lives of women, and explained the different narrative strategies I utilised to write about a woman's history in fiction. Yet, despite writing a novel that strives to highlight the gaps and silences in women's histories, there remains lingering questions of why the details of 'ordinary' women's lives are so difficult to find. This paper examines the reasons why archival information about women's lives is difficult to unearth, and details some of the ways in which genres such as the social sciences, memoir and fiction have endeavoured to find and document women's histories. It examines both the loss of women's history and the ways in which this loss has been, and is being, addressed by writers. It is my contention that it is not only a lack of salient documentation that prohibits certain stories about women from being narrated in fiction, but also that the conventions of realist fiction - particularly the emphasis on revelation and closure - inhibit the narration of certain lives. By challenging the conventions of realism, we, as writers can not only acknowledge the silences that persist in the lives of women in the past, but also signal new ways to write around them.
Keywords: women; silence; historical fiction

In my paper 'Mixing Memory with the Desire to Forget' given at the Australian Association of Writing Program's annual conference in 2009, I detailed the difficulty in researching the life of one of my ancestors, and outlined the ways in which fiction can be used to illuminate the gaps and silences that still exist around 'ordinary' women's histories. At the conference, and indeed any time that I tell people about my PhD, the reaction to my work is always the same. Firstly I am asked whether I ever did find out the 'truth' about my lost ancestor, and secondly, someone confides in me their struggle to unearth a shadowy figure in their family history, or tells me about a skeleton that has recently appeared in their collective family closet. There is little doubt that the unearthing of family histories has become increasingly popular. Blame the television programs that trace people's ancestries, or the genealogical guides that can be downloaded from various websites or purchased at department stores. Or blame the writers, many of them fiction writers, I might add, who are exhuming tales of people long buried, dusting them off and adding a spicy pinch of fiction to make the characters more appealing. Whatever the cause, it seems that western culture is preoccupied with looking back.

This paper will explore my reasons for abandoning the search for my ancestor's lost story, and will describe how this decision was integral in writing my manuscript 'The Other Side of Silence' (Kon-yu 2009a). I will trace the difficulties associated with finding archival information about ordinary women born in previous generations, and explain the trends (in fiction and the social sciences) that have tried to account for, or recover these losses. It is my contention that writing about women's histories - which have been lost, obscured or omitted from public archives - in fiction is made even more difficult by the genre's dependence upon revelation and closure. By giving up the search for 'the truth' in my own fiction, I was able to investigate how these omissions are created, and to experiment with ways to write around the silences.

My project was initially motivated by a backwards glance into my family history, and the desire to capture, even for a moment, the elusive figures that seemed to haunt it. Every family has secrets, and mine is no different. In trying to trace the life of one of my ancestors, I found myself met by silences in every place I searched. There was no mention of her in the town's archives, and I can only guess this is because she lived under a different name, or perhaps the church (which used to keep all civil records) would have sanitised her life before archiving it. Yet these barriers to her archival records were also matched by my family's intention to keep the story silenced. The silence that surrounded this woman was being actively maintained so that the shame of the past might stay in the past. This sanction on telling the stories of women's lives, because of shame or fear of giving offence, seems to be common in writing about women from the past. As Maria Simms writes of her own PhD experience:

> I set out, if not quite in high spirits at least with interest and hope, to write a postmodern, feminist novel for my PhD. Through a postmodern playing with notions of truth and historicity I intended my novel to join others in the process of re-inscribing women into the narratives of history. (Simms 2004)

However, Simms is unable to gain access to the historical woman in whom she is interested, prevented by those who did not want the story told. Unable to write about the life of her historical subject, Simms decides instead 'to write a crime novel'. Yet she laments this situation:

> I do wonder about the novel that might have been had I continued with the original idea of writing a fictional history/biography, and there remains with me an uneasy sense of having allowed myself to be silenced as women were in the past.

The uneasiness Simms expresses is understandable, especially given the trend in historical fiction to 'recuperate' history, and to highlight those who have been sidelined by traditional historical discourse. The impetus to write about my ancestor's life in fiction came from a desire to tell her story in a way that could transcend the shame fel by previous generations. By not telling her story, I feared that I would be colluding in the larger silencing of women's lives.[1]

The difficulty in unearthing the details about women's lives is not a new problem. At the turn of the 20th century - around the same time that my ancestor's life was being obscured, deleted or ignored - Virginia Woolf speculated that women's absence from the discourse of history contributed to their silence, or misrepresentation, in literature. In her essay 'Women and Fiction', Woolf suggests that women's history:

> lies at present locked in old diaries, stuffed in old drawers, half-obliterated in the memories of the aged. It is to be found in the lives of the obscure - in those almost unlit corridors of history where the figures of generations of women are so dimly, so fitfully perceived. For very little is known about women. (1929: 141)

The absence of women writers, women's distortion by or omission from literature is, for Woolf, a result of their absence from history. One of the 20th century's most insightful writers, Woolf not only noted the silencing of ordinary women's lives, but began to investigate how this silencing was perpetuated in both history and, as I will explore later in this paper, through fiction. Indeed, Gabrielle McIntire suggests that evident in *A Room of One's Own* is 'an early feminist lament for the effaced and invisible that precedes 1970s, 1980s, and still-ongoing valorization by half a century or more' (2008: 189).

Researching women's lives

The absence of women in historical discourse Woolf noted at the turn of the 20th century was significantly redressed by feminists within the discourses of history and the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s. In *Gender and the Politics of History,* historian Joan Wallach Scott notes that the titles of the books published at the beginning of the women's history movement explicitly conveyed their author's intentions: 'Those who had been "Hidden from History" were "Becoming Visible". Although recent book titles announce many new themes, the mission of their authors remains to construct women as historical subjects' (Scott 1988: 17). The emphasis on social history and the advent of 'her-story' turned a spotlight on those women's lives that had been largely omitted or left unrecorded in favour of what Scott cites as the 'maps and chaps' version of history. She argues: 'the "her-story" approach has had important effects on historical scholarship. By piling up the evidence about women in the past it refutes the claims of those who insist women had no history, no significant place in stories of the past' (1988: 20). This shift necessitated the re-evaluation of certain documents, such as journals and letters, which were once deemed too subjective to be included in historical discourse. These stories, written primarily as biographies, memoirs or social histories, sat alongside conventional historical discourse rather than replacing it. In *Woman, Native, Other* Trinh Minh-ha suggests that as a result of the sexism inherent in what she terms 'capital H History' the 're-writing of history is therefore an endless task, one to which feminist scholars have devoted much of their energy' (Trinh 1989: 84).

The difficulties of researching the lives of women have been documented in a number of ways, and through differing genres. In her memoir *Hidden Lives* (1996), Margaret Forster faces similar constraints to my own in writing about the women who came before her. Forster sets out to uncover the lives of her mother and grandmother, Lilian and Margaret Ann. The memoir begins with a scene set in 1936: Margaret Ann is visited by a stranger, a woman, whom she receives in the privacy of her bedroom. Given this intimacy, Margaret's daughter Lilian is curious about who this woman may be. After the woman leaves the house, Margaret Ann stays in her room for the next eight hours:

> When Margaret Ann did come down she never once referred to her visitor or anything that had been said. Nothing. No explanation whatsoever. And Lilian, remarkably, never asked a

> single question. She was too afraid of her mother's evident distress to pry. (Forster 1996: 5)

After Margaret Ann's death her three daughters, Lilian, Jean and Nan, are visited by another woman who enquires about Margaret Ann's will, stating that she is Margaret Ann's illegitimate daughter. After reading their mother's will, Lilian, Jean and Nan see no mention of anyone but themselves: 'No need for panic. No need to revise the revered character and conduct of the good, the wise, the kind, the gentle, the honest, the almost saintly Margaret Ann, their beloved mother' (1996: 11). For Forster, these two events propel her to dig beneath the surface of her grandmother's life, in an attempt to identify both the first female visitor and the 'alleged' other daughter. Forster's mother Lilian, however, is reticent to divulge much about her mother's life. The incident with the woman who approaches them after the funeral deeply affects Lilian, who suspects that her mother has concealed the truth from her. As a result, she is unwilling to talk about these parts of Margaret Ann's life.

While Forster is able to shed significant light on Lilian's past, she cannot fully account for the life of her maternal grandmother, Margaret Ann. After her mother's death, Forster 'felt freed from the taboo [Lilian had] placed on any attempt to unravel the background of Margaret Ann' (Forster 1996: 13). Searches through archival records found that Margaret Ann was the illegitimate daughter of a servant girl: 'How pathetic, I thought, that all the mystery was to hide this banal fact. How ordinary, how disappointing' (1996: 13). Forster also discovers Margaret Ann *did* have an illegitimate daughter, Alice, whom she hid from her three legitimate daughters. Although she is surprised by this secret, Forster realises that she does not bear the same cultural shame as her mother and grandmother. Born in a different era, she writes, 'my chances, my lot, my expectations . . . were always a hundred times better than my mother's or grandmother's' (1996: 306).

For Forster the silencing of her grandmother's story (by both Margaret Ann and Lilian) indicates the much larger problem of researching these kinds of women's lives: 'sometimes beneath the stories lurks the history of more than the ordinary person. Sometimes their stories are the stories of thousands. My grandmother's story seems to me representative in that kind of way' (1996: 13). Unable to reconcile the disparate images she has of Margaret Ann - those arising from her research into Alice's life, and Lilian's account of a God-fearing and loving mother - Forster concedes that the shameful details of her grandmother's life will remain a mystery: 'Theories, informed speculative ideas, play a part in all biography but, in the case of the Alices of this world, there is virtually nothing else after the meagre official records have been scrutinised' (1996: 107). The book concludes with Forster's realisation that she will never fully understand her grandmother's relationship with her illegitimate daughter. She speculates that to answer these questions would be:

> the stuff of fiction – so tempting to invent a history for Alice, to imagine a plausible explanation for my grandmother's apparently callous treatment of her and be then able, graciously, to forgive her . . . but it is not my grandmother who needs to be forgiven. It is the times she lived in, those harsh times for women. (1996: 306)

Forster, a well-known writer of fiction as well as biography, does not succumb and invent a history for Alice in *Hidden Lives.* The text, rather, displays an awareness of the generic boundaries of memoir, and remains true to the factual information about Forster's mother and grandmother. What interested me most about *Hidden Lives* was that the situation with the mysterious woman at the

memoir's opening is never resolved within the text. The woman's identity is speculated about, but never confirmed. It is my contention that Forster *wants* to show the gaps in her family's history, and that memoir allows her the space to do this. If she invented a fictional history to fill in those gaps then they would simply be erased, and the researching of women's lives would not be problematised within the text. As it is, Forster's memoir displays anger towards a culture that silences women's lives, and I think that this is ultimately the most powerful thing about *Hidden Lives*. Inventing a fictional history for Alice would not allow Forster to point out the problems in researching women's lives as this memoir does.

The silencing of lives such as Margaret Ann's and Alice's is a poignant example that certain kinds of shame do not transcend cultural boundaries. Heilbrun suggests that, 'In our own time of many possible life patterns, it is difficult to grasp how absolutely women of an earlier age could expel themselves from conventional society (that is, all society) by committing a social, usually a sexual, sin' (Heilbrun 1988: 306). Despite the fact that my ancestor lived in a time when these taboos were upheld, and I do not, I still recoiled from writing a narrative based on the little material I had found, for fear of causing my family pain or embarrassment. I was finding that, as Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn suggest, 'History is something that cannot be eluded, is always there and also *here*; although we do not repeat it directly, we nevertheless live in its consequences in every moment' (2004: 138). The desire to narrate the life of an ordinary woman's past did not go away, though I realised that I had to change my approach to telling this particular story.

Writing fiction

Diane Wallace points out that the '1980s saw the beginning of a renaissance in the "serious" or "literary" woman's historical novel, a stream of novels which broadened into a veritable flood in the 1990s' (2005: 176). For example, Margaret Atwood, AS Byatt, Margaret Forster, Kate Grenville, Maxine Hong Kingston, Drusilla Modjeska, Toni Morrison and Amy Tan, to name a few, have all written fiction about women's lives.[2] Among these were novels that placed women into recognisable historical events, as Morrison does in *Beloved* (1987); novels that retold stories from women's perspectives, as Margaret Atwood did in *Alias Grace* (1996); and novels that featured women talking candidly about the past, as Tan does in *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991). The novel has been viewed as a space in which women could write about those whose lives had been sidelined, skewed or silenced by official discourses such as history, and the popularity of women's historical fiction coincided with the re-definition of women's history in the social sciences. Indeed, Heilmann and Llewellyn assert that 'historical fiction offers (women) and their female characters a means of reclamation, a narrative empowerment to write women back into the historical record' (2004: 144).

For me, it seemed fiction was a way in which I could write about a woman's life without being constrained by the limitations of empirical, factual information. But I soon found out that choosing *how* to tell this woman's story was problematic, especially when examining the different ways writers represent women's lives in historical fiction, and their various reasons for doing so. Given the very real problem of women's exclusion from historical discourse, and the shame that inhibits the passing on of certain stories I felt that writing a fiction that simply filled in the gaps would perpetuate the idea that information about women's history can be easily recovered. Instead, I wanted to write a fiction that would not gloss over the difficulties in finding

information about a woman from the past. I was impressed with the way in which Forster insisted on showing the reader the omissions in her memoir, and I wondered if there was a way which fiction could draw attention to these same silences.

In choosing to write fiction, I wanted to remain mindful of the difficulties I'd had in being able to access the facts about my lost ancestor. It was these difficulties I faced, and Forster documents so well, that made me sceptical of the relatively easy way the revelation of the truth is handled in some women's historical fiction. Writers such as Tan, whose books have been popular with mainstream audiences as well as critics, rely heavily on the idea of revelation and closure. In her best-selling novels *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Kitchen God's Wife* (based on Tan's mother's life), the secrets of the past are revealed, and the narratives are neatly wrapped up. I realised that inherent in such texts was not only the idea that 'the truth' exists, but also a reliance on the generic conventions of realist fiction, in particular the revelation/closure nexus, which enabled the telling of these stories. As I began writing, it became evident that realism itself might have prohibited unresolved stories (such as Forster's) from ever being narrated.

The fictional critique of realism

Many novelists have written fragmented narratives about women's lives, and not all novels rely on the revelation/closure nexus that most authors of women's historical fiction depend upon. Pam Morris suggests that in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) Woolf breaks with the conventions of realism prevalent in her time:

> 'plot' is encompassed in a single day and resolves no mysteries, leaves the future of the lives presented in the story as uncertain as at the beginning . . . in technical terms, the novel refutes **closure**: nothing and no one is summed up in the writing as a coherent truth that can be known. (2003: 15; emphasis in original)

Lyn Pykett argues that Woolf 'seemed to express a preference for a fictional method that would (as it were) see the fragments of experience in all their fragmentary and evanescent detail and yet still see them whole' (Pykett 1995: 98). Earlier in this paper I suggested that Woolf drew attention to the ways in which women were made absent from history. At the same time, Woolf asserted that the classic realist text had suppressed, omitted or distorted the lives of women. Her essay 'Modern Fiction' provides one of the earliest feminist critiques of realist fiction. For Woolf, the realist form does not accurately represent reality as it is experienced. She observes that 'Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end'. She goes on to ask, 'Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it might display? (Woolf 1919: 106). For Woolf, the author is 'constrained, not by his [sic] own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him [sic] in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest' (1919: 106). Evident in her fiction is the unpicking of these realist conventions and the emergence of stories about women that are differently positioned.

The critical attention Woolf paid to history and to fiction has been well documented by feminists, and her work is still enormously influential today. Indeed, as McIntire asserts:

> It is time, then, that we think of Virginia Woolf not only as author and feminist polemicist, but also as an important modernist thinker of time, memory and history whose refusal to privilege the status of public events and moments of national or cultural display anticipates postmodernist revisionist histories. (2008: 190)

McIntire also argues that Woolf's 'yearning to make an inscription where there has formerly been only a blank, and to demand a space for the unwritten, therefore stand at the root of both her feminism and her impulses to think historiographically' (2008: 190). I would suggest that the techniques Woolf utilised in her novels to undermine the classic realist text have been echoed by poststructuralist writers who seek to inscribe women's lives in fiction. Wallace writes that, in the 1990s, historical novels authored by women 'do not seek straightforwardly to represent history in the sense of mirroring or reproducing it' (Wallace 2005: 204). For Wallace, these novels:

> contest the idea of a single unitary and linear history. They emphasise the subjective, fragmentary nature of historical knowledge through re-writings of canonical texts, through multiple or divided narrators, fragmentary or contradictory narratives, and disruptions of linear chronology. (2005: 204)

In short, the methods utilised in these novels were pioneered by Woolf, and her influence can be seen in a number of texts that seek to redress women's history by critiquing the generic conventions of realism. Poststructuralist discourse, in particular the examination of the logocentric nature of language, the binary structures on which meaning is predicated, and the importance of difference in constituting meaning, has provided feminists with a language to describe the variations and departures from realism Woolf practiced. Novels such as Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1977), Morrison's *Beloved*, Modjeska's *Poppy* (1990) and Carol Shields' *The Stone Diaries* (1994) use non-realist techniques to narrate women's lives in fiction. These novels all utilise poststructuralist and postmodernist narrative strategies - shifting points of view, an unreliable narrative voice - to show how the adherence to conventional realist form may silence certain kinds of stories and, by extension, certain kinds of lives. By doing so these texts differently express women's experiences, but also go some way to addressing the epistemological concerns that have continued to silence women's lived experiences. This concern with the generic limitations of the conventional realist undermines the mimetic quality of realist texts. As Morris argues, 'realist novels *never* give us life or a slice of life, nor do they reflect reality . . . realism is a representational form and a representation can never be identical with that which it represents' (2003: 4; emphasis in original). Furthermore, this disruption of the traditional realist text has allowed writers 'to shatter the façade of empirical reality' (2003: 43).

The other side of silence

Rather than using fiction to fill in the gaps in my ancestor's history, then, I decided to write a creative text that would explicitly acknowledge the existence of these gaps and silences, thereby reminding the reader of the epistemological problems encountered in the process of researching and writing women's

stories. As such 'The Other Side of Silence' uses narrative strategies to illuminate a woman's life in fiction, bearing in mind all that *cannot* be disclosed about her past. In my own research, I was frustrated by the active silencing of so-called 'ordinary' women's lives, yet I was interested by these silences: not only the stories that lay behind them, but also the act of silencing itself, the process by which a woman's life from the past becomes unavailable to us in the present. Once I decided to write fiction, I decided that there would be, in my story, no confession, no reconciliation, no recuperation. There would be no 'filling in' of the gaps and silences. I still wanted to write within a realist framework so I suppose, in one sense, I wanted to allude to something that could have happened. But I wanted my project to draw attention to the omissions, silences and contradictions about a fictional woman from the past, without glossing over what could not be known.

Most of my creative text is narrated by Alba, a young woman who is migrating from Italy to Australia, hoping to move away from the shame of her past; a shame, it is suggested, that her mother Serafina also shares. Serafina, then, is the character who most resembles my lost ancestor, and the details of Serafina's past are eventually silenced through the story; both by Alba's physical departure, as well as by the ways in which Alba cannot recall those shameful episodes of the past within the text. Many of the techniques which I used to achieve this are discussed at length in 'Mixing Memory with the Desire to Forget' (Kon-yu 2009b), which looks specifically at how memory functions in my creative text. The disruption of memory, while a valuable technique, was one of many I experimented with in my novel. Others include the different ways in which characters articulate the past, the contradictory ways in which different characters narrate the same events, and the use of the subjective third-person narrative voice. My intention was to obscure Serafina's life as the novel progressed, so that by the end of the text the character has almost vanished entirely. In this way, the frustration that the reader might feel at the end of the text mirrors my own frustration at my inability to find out the details of my ancestor's life, and hopefully leaves the reader to think about these larger silences.

It was critical to emphasise the epistemological problems in uncovering stories about women within a creative framework. Shields has written about the restrictions on telling women's stories in a culture dominated by what she has defined as 'the narrative arc . . . of rising action - tumescence, detumescence - what some feminists call the ejaculatory mode of storytelling' (Shields 2003: 35). She expresses a desire to find other ways to write about women in fiction:

> If postmodernism has proved a synthetic discourse, unanimated by personal concerns, at least it has given writers a breath of that precious oxygen of permission, and more important, time to see in what ways the old realism - the mirror of the world - has failed us. It was perhaps, not real enough. (2003: 34)

I felt very strongly that I couldn't reveal the particulars about my fictional character's past, especially if they were the reasons her story would have been silenced in the first place. 'The Other Side of Silence' has been motivated by a desire to illustrate, within fiction, how certain narratives about women become suppressed, while pointing to the indefinable complexities of these marginalised women's stories.

One of the most salient discoveries of my PhD has been that researching and writing about women in the past is fraught with difficulties. These difficulties have arisen both from a lack of information available about women, and from the textual demands of conventional realism. As a result, I have learnt to work

with the silences, omissions and distortions about women, such as my ancestor, and to do so in creative ways. Writers like Morrison, Hong-Kingston, Modjeska, Atwood and Shields have provided the reader and writer with different ways to narrate women's lives, suggesting that even if information about these women is incomplete, stark or fragmentary, these lives should be told, and told imaginatively. These authors suggest that telling these lives in such a way is actually more credible, more satisfying.

'I need to bear witness to an uncertain event,' Anne Enright writes in the opening pages of her novel *The Gathering*: 'I can feel it roaring inside me, this thing that may not have taken place' (Enright 2007: 1). Enright's novel is about love and loss; more specifically it is a family story, filled with speculations and memories the narrator painstakingly re-constructs. The narrative ends with a version of the 'truth' about the 'uncertain event' that may have caused the narrator's brother to commit suicide. Yet the narrator's need to 'bear witness' to such an event is a sentiment I understand. The novel provides an example of a fictional text that blurs the lines between fact and fiction, history and truth. In trying to articulate an incident from the past the narrator suggests that 'History is such a romantic place . . . [if] it would just stay still, I think, and settle down. If it would just stop sliding around in my head' (2007: 13). And although the narrator expresses frustration at not being able to recall the past wholly or coherently, she hits upon something which has become central to my understanding of history: that it does not stay in one place, that as we recall or unearth events we are complicit in (re)creating them. Trinh argues that a common misconception of history is that 'the Past, unrelated to the Present and the Future, is lying there in its entirety, waiting to be revealed and related' (1989: 104). Clearly, in the case of many women's histories, this is not true. In fact the prohibitions on finding out the truth Forster faced, Simms faced, and I also encountered, remind us that the past is never separate from the present, and texts that suggest as much may intimate that these kinds of histories can be found, if we have the right tools to excavate them. They do not take into account the complex relationship between the past and the present, and often do not question the fictional structures that perpetuate such myths.

By examining the 'resources and limitations' of writing fiction, which Woolf refers to, I have come to a different understanding of what these terms might signify. Rather than being stymied by what I had previously viewed as 'limitations' (the silences, distortions or unspeakability of women's lives), I have come to view these as rich, challenging and promising resources. I have finally let go of the idea of finding out the truth of my lost ancestor's story, and in doing so, have recognised that many such stories will remain silenced. While I do sometimes wonder about the specifics of my ancestor's life, I have come to recognise the importance of telling a version of her story, albeit in a very different manner from the way I had first envisaged doing. By releasing myself from the need to know, I have been able to turn my attention to unpicking the fictional conventions that prohibit these kinds of narratives from ever being told. Rather than trying to write a narrative about one woman's history, it has been more useful for me, as a writer, to examine why these silences occur and to find narrative strategies that might illuminate these silences. And even though I mourn for my ancestor's lost story, I am relieved that I have at least been able to shed a little light on the loss, and to write some way into the silence.

Notes

1. This paper looks only at the issue of women's history; the case for men's history is a subject for a different work. return to text

2. Novels such as Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996); AS Byatt's *Possession: a romance* (1990); Margaret Forster's *Hidden lives: a family memoir* (1996); Kate Grenville's *The secret river* (2005); Maxine Hong Kingston's *The woman warrior: memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts* (1977); Drusilla Modjeska's *Poppy* (1990); Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987); Amy Tan's *The joy luck club* (1989) either represent or discuss notions of women's history. return to text

List of works cited

Atwood, Margaret 1996 *Alias Grace,* London: Bloomsbury return to text

Byatt, AS 1990 *Possession: a romance,* London: Chatto & Windus return to text

Enright, Anne 2007 *The gathering*, London: Jonathan Cape return to text

Forster, Margaret 1996 *Hidden lives: A family memoir*, London: Penguin return to text

Grenville, Kate 2005 *The secret river*, Melbourne: Text Publishing return to text

Heilbrun, Carolyn 1988 *Writing a woman's life,* New York: Norton return to text

Heilmann, Ann & Mark Llewellyn 2004 'Hystorical fictions: women (re)writing and (re)reading history' *Women: A Cultural Review* 15.2: 137-249 return to text

Hong Kingston, Maxine 1977 *The woman warrior: Memoirs of a girlhood among ghosts*, London: Allen Lane return to text

Kon-yu, Natalie 2009a *The other side of silence; using fiction to explore the resources and limitations in writing about women's lives*. PhD thesis, Murdoch University return to text

Kon-yu, Natalie 2009b 'Mixing memory with the desire to forget', *The Margins and Mainstreams Papers: the refereed proceedings of the 14th conference of the Australian Association of Writing Programs,* http://aawp.org.au/files/Konyu_0.pdf return to text

McIntire, Gabrielle 2008 *Modernism, memory, and desire: TS Eliot and Virginia Woolf,* Cambridge:Cambridge University Press return to text

Modjeska, Drusilla 1990 *Poppy,* Ringwood, VIC: Penguin return to text

Morris, Pam 2003 *Realism*, New York: Routledge return to text

Morrison, Toni 1987 *Beloved,* London: Vintage return to text

Pykett, Lyn 1995 *Engendering fictions: the English novel in the early twentieth century*, London: Edward Arnold return to text

Scott, Joan Wallach 1988 *Gender and the politics of history,* New York: Columbia UP return to text

Shields, Carol 1994 *The stone diaries,* London: Fourth Estate return to text

Shields, Carol 2003 'Narrative hunger and the overflowing cupboard', in E Eden and D Goertz (eds), *Carol Shields, narrative hunger, and the possibilities of fiction,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 19-38 return to text

Simms, Maria 2004 'Fictional fears and guarded facts: an experience in writing a ficto-historical novel' *TEXT* 8.2, http:www.textjournal.com.au/oct04/simms.htm (accessed 20 September 2008) return to text

Tan, Amy 1989 *The joy luck club*, New York: Putnam's return to text

Tan, Amy 1991 *The kitchen god's wife,* London: Flamingo return to text

Trinh, T. Minh-ha 1989 *Woman, native, other: writing postcoloniality and feminism,* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press return to text

Wallace, Diane 2005 *The woman's historical novel: British women writers, 1900-2000*, Palgrave: London return to text

Woolf, Virginia 1919 'Modern fiction', in Leonard Woolf (ed) 1967, *Collected essays* (vol 3), London: Hogarth Press return to text

Woolf, Virginia 1925 *Mrs Dalloway,* London: Hogarth return to text

Woolf, Virginia 1929 *A room of one's own,* London: Hogarth return to text

Natalie Kon-yu was recently awarded her PhD in English and the Creative Arts from Murdoch University, Western Australia. She is living in Melbourne, and is currently teaching at the University of Melbourne and Victoria University. She is a member of the Centre for Everyday Life at Murdoch University, and is part of a team that authors the weekly 'Slow Living' column for The CanberraTimes*. Natalie was the recipient of the Emerging-Writer-in-Residence at Katherine Susannah Prichard Writing Foundation for 2009, and her manuscript* The other side of silence *was long-listed for The Australian/Vogel award.*

TEXT
Vol 14 No 2 October 2010
http://www.textjournal.com.au
Editors: Nigel Krauth & Jen Webb
Text@griffith.edu.au