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Going to the gallows: a sonic biography

Abstract:

When the tale of Francis Knorr, the baby farming murderess, went to air on ABC Radio National's *Soundproof* as an experimental radio drama, it was a literal attempt to parallel an historical story with the lived present by playing two scenes at once. This was done by actors performing Knorr's story and by going to the gallows with an Iranian musician and recording her music in the exact spot where the baby farming murderess was hanged. These two sound elements were then woven together to make the broadcast. The actors' words came from an edited version of eyewitness newspaper accounts of Knorr's execution on 15 January 1894. This article is a reflection on the successes and failures of the endeavour. It serves as a wider examination of factors that take historical biofictions into realms beyond prose and highlights the impacts of such interventions. Further, in keeping with the radio form, this investigation draws on sonic geography as a useful parallel methodology.

Biographical note:

Dr Lyn Gallacher is a radio-producer for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, working on Radio National's *Earshot* and *The History Listen* programs. She is also a writer, academic and pilot. Her first PhD, about Compositional Linguistics, was awarded through the English department at La Trobe University, and her second explores the fate of tiny airports in Australia. It is being completed within the School of Geography, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Melbourne.

Keywords:

Sonic geography, sonic biography, biofiction, radio drama, sound design

Introduction

On Friday 17 June 2016, just after the 9pm news, ABC Radio National (RN) broadcast the story of a baby farming murderess on a now-extinct radio program called *Soundproof.* The host, Miyuki Jokiranta, whose role it was to introduce contributions from a wide variety of producers, explained to the listeners that they were about to hear a piece incorporating traditional Persian instruments being played against a backdrop of first-hand eyewitness accounts of the murderess's hanging, which took place in Melbourne on 15 January 1894. Jokiranta also added that the murderess's name was Frances Knorr and that 'baby farming' was an old-fashioned term used to describe the practice of caring for illegitimate, or unwanted children, for money (Gallacher, 2016, 0:00:20).

To set the scene further, listeners were told that, in order to compose this piece for *Soundproof,* the Iranian composer, Gelareh Pour, had been positioned in the exact spot where Frances Knorr was put to death inside the Old Melbourne Gaol (Gallacher, 2016).

It was imagined as a hopeful, emotive, associative gesture, like the one that writer Catherine Padmore describes, when she writes of dipping her nib in ink to compose a diary with the very same tools as her 16th century subject (2017), and akin to the practice-led research project that Ariella Van Luyn embarks on in her biofiction of the infamous Lizzie O'Dea (2019), doyen of the 1920s Queensland underbelly. Placing Pour in the gaol to play her music was intended to encourage a similar feeling of haunting. Because this was radio, no one could see where the microphones were when the music was being recorded; nevertheless we, the producers, were hoping this choice of location would help bridge the gap between Pour's contemporary musical interpretation of the story and Knorr herself who, along with many others, had died on this spot. Jokiranta then continued:

> For Gelareh the story is not so much about the past, as it is about the present. Baby farming still happens in Iran today. A child born without a father cannot be registered. Meaning it does not exist. So, babies, in this corner of the world, continue to be sold. Who knows how many there are?
>
> Francis Knorr, now with the help of an Iranian musician, sings again. (Gallacher, 2016, 0:01:04)

At the time, the purpose of including a program like *Soundproof* in the ABC RN schedule was to give room for inventive feature-makers and sound designers to carve out a space for experimentation. The brief, as set out at the inception of this program, was unashamedly innovative and forward-looking, and traces of this intent could, for a time, still be seen in what remained of the website. Back in 2016 there was thought to be room in the line-up for this sort of creative audio – audio that pushes beyond all genres – creating a space where voice, sound and music fuse together in order to produce an environment where it is possible to listen differently, one that is beyond words. Now, scheduling decisions oriented towards the generation of ever greater download numbers have made the RN line-up a more conservative space.

This article, then, explores the creation of this radio drama and seeks to understand how successful this particular 'baby farming' episode was in achieving these aims. Did this specific instance of sound, voice and music fusing together over disparate times and cultures cause something else to become unstuck? Answering this question evokes some of the current theoretical debates surrounding historical biofiction, but also raises unique concerns from the realms of sonic biography.

Who was Frances Knorr?

The basic details of Frances Knorr's life have been kept in the public eye, partly because her death mask is one of the prize items on display at the Old Melbourne Gaol. Her ghostly face sits in a glass exhibition case there, and in so doing assures her of a place in the annals of Victoria's dark history. Knorr was born on 6 November 1867 in Middlesex, England. She was the second daughter in a family of seven children, her father being a respectable London hat-maker. When Knorr was 18 years old, she had an affair with a soldier from the local barracks, and after disappearing from home for several days and arriving back in a dishevelled state, she was permanently banished. It was thought she would be an immoral influence on her younger siblings. At first, she was sent to a home for wayward girls and then, as further punishment, dispatched to Australia to survive there as best she could. She arrived in Sydney on the *Abyssinia* in 1887, and initially found work in domestic service, then as a waitress, and then, in 1889, married German-born waiter and petty criminal Rudolph (Rudi) Knorr. They moved to Melbourne, where in 1892, Rudi was gaoled. Frances, then destitute and with a toddler to support through the height of the 1890s Depression, took up with Edward Thompson, a fishmonger's assistant; but, when he left her, she did what many desperate women did at the time – she took up baby farming (Culture Victoria, 2016). This story has been told and retold, not only by the Old Melbourne Gaol and Culture Victoria, but also by Judith Rodriguez in her poem 'The Hanging of Minnie Thwaites' (2012) and Kellinde Wrightson in the biofiction *The Notorious Frances Thwaites* (2014). Each of these authors follows the biographical details of Knorr's life to resurrect her in their own way, so that they can, as the radio program does, draw their own conclusions. Each of these depictions of Knorr's life puts the past to work for the present.

Recording inside the gaol

When the radio presenter's introduction of the program ended, the first words of the feature itself began in a soft murmur, mounting to a chant of the subject's name: "Frances Lydia Alice Knorr" (Gallacher, 2016, 0:01:58). This use of the proper name – the name of the deceased person in the text – is an acknowledged defining feature of historical biofictions (Lackey, 2016, pp. 4-5; Van Luyn, 2019, p. 68). The issue is somewhat complicated in this case as the subject herself went by many names: she is called Frances Thwaites by Wrightson (2014), and Minnie Thwaites by Rodriguez (2012). Nevertheless, such complication is part of this woman's story, so the opening chant in the radio feature ended abruptly with the line that Frances Lydia Alice

Knorr was born with the name Minnie Thwaites. The actors were improvising at this point, making this naming slippery and rhythmical as they turned it into music. The intention here was to emphasise the performative nature of the piece and to signal to the audience right from the start that this piece was taking place in the world of artifice, even though the story it told was true. This foregrounds the haunting paradox described by Padmore when she and other writers of biofiction conjure up ghosts from the past and find themselves in an argument with their own imaginations and what has been dubbed the "authenticity effect" (Van Luyn, 2019, p. 68). In an analysis of her own work, Padmore comes to the conclusion that authenticity is "an effect of the text on a reader's perceptions, rather than an unqualified attribute of the text itself" (2017). It is a definition that sits well alongside the methods that this project was using to summon spirits from their graves.

On paper, the 'Baby Farming Murderess' script looked like this:

> **Voice 1 & 2:** Frances Lydia Alice Knorr
>
> *(repeat in a whisper that gets gradually louder)*
>
> *Music drone under mounts in intensity*
>
> **Voice 2:** Frances Lydia Alice Knorr was born Minnie Thwaites.
>
> *(this statement breaks the loop as drone stops)*
>
> **Voice 1:** Why this child and not that one?
>
> **Voice 2:** Why this life and not that one?
>
> **Voice 1 & 2:** Frances Lydia Alice Knorr.
>
> *(voices return to drone)*
>
> *Music repeats*
>
> **Voice 2:** This is the name on her death mask which is still on display at the Old Melbourne Gaol.
>
> *Music morphs into a Persian interpretation of the hymn 'Safe in the Arms of Jesus'.*

According to 1894 reports in *The Age,* 'Safe in the Arms of Jesus' was the hymn Knorr sang in her cell just before her execution (p. 5). It became a pivotal part of the radio drama, a way of connecting the 'then' of Knorr's time with the 'now' of Pour's. Right from the start, the sound design encouraged listeners to connect this specific story to wider, more existential, contemporary questions, and reframe Knorr's tale by making comparisons with other stories of a similar nature that might exist across time and culture. Why this life and not that one? Why should one child live, while another dies? Hence, Pour's version of this European hymn was a Persian one, which she played on traditional Persian instruments while seated in the exact spot in contemporary Melbourne where Francis was hanged in 1894. The process of production was

planned to reflect and expand the process of creation. As Pour was playing, she was also listening to the actors' voices in her headphones. We recorded the actors first and recorded Pour later – each voice and track kept in sync but recorded separately. Even though Pour was taking her cue from the headphones, we wanted to keep the sound sources separate, so we could mix everything together more sensitively when we were back in the studio. This way we would have more control and would be able to hear the reverberations of the cold, damp, sound-space of the gaol. It also meant that in the studio we could move the recording around to any one of the different microphones we had placed in various positions inside the gaol. There was, for instance, a microphone close to Pour, a distant microphone, a microphone inside one of the cells, a microphone on the upstairs gantry, and even a microphone outside the main building which picked up the audio of tourists in the gift shop. We had thought this microphone might give us some useful transition sounds between the past and present. It did not. It was a distraction. The story simply did not resonate here. What did resonate was the sound of the National Trust's costumed gaoler ringing a bell at closing time to usher visitors out, which was used in the final mix. This sound held the suggestion that we, the production team and the audience, were *all* tourists here in this moment, and that none of us could stay in this imitation of the past beyond our allotted hour. The poignant sound simultaneously reinforced and deconstructed the effect of 'authenticity' by reminding listeners of the brackets around the auditory world they were immersed in but about to leave. This sound served as a bridge between the artificial 'then' and 'now', that we as producers had been working so hard to create.

Newspapers as talking text

The other distinctive characteristic of this production was the intention to preserve a sense of the first-person eyewitness accounts that appeared in abundance in the newspapers – primarily *The Age* and *The Argus* – at the time. These records were not difficult to access, and they are strikingly graphic in comparison to the newspaper reporting of today. The thrill of reading these first-hand eyewitness accounts is one with which writers of historical biofiction will be familiar: Van Luyn, for example, in her research into O'Dea, found newspapers gave her a picture of her incorrigible, if occasionally larger-than-life, subject (Van Luyn, 2019, p. 68).

These newspaper accounts, however, were fashioned as text: as written, not spoken language. Despite this, we decided to keep as much of this form of language from 1894 as we could. It seemed the right way to tell the story and reflected something of the changing nature of journalism as well as the immediate brutality of such public deaths. These newspaper articles did include a few quotes directly from Frances herself, but the idea of who Frances was in these daily reports was very much mediated by the nature of her notoriety and the way these crimes were situated in mainstream journalism at the time. This in itself was interesting. Nowhere else in our nation's public archive are there such detailed, first-hand, close-up eyewitness accounts of executions. These newspapers made the story visceral and, in a sense, radio-ready; just like radio program makers today, journalists in the 1890s could not rely on pictures. They had already crafted the story using the kind of details that evoke a scene and structured the narrative accordingly. This was enormously useful in recreating the immediacy of the voice and provided rich examples of the elocution of the times. *The Argus* for instance, in reporting on the trial,

described a Mrs Goldspink as "a lady who was connected with a benevolent institution" and, in the same sentence, mentioned a Mrs Walkden:

> who had also seen the infant before it was taken to Brunswick and asked the prisoner where she got it and says the prisoner replied that she had got it from Mrs Goldspink adding that Mrs Goldspink was going to pay half the expense and the mother the other half. (*The Argus*, 28 Nov 1893, p. 6)

Here, deep into the reporting of the trial, we have convoluted sentence structures and the extensive employment of the passive voice. Journalists today do not write like this, making the challenge of translating these words into a contemporary radio script both enticing and problematic. We wanted to keep the sense of being only one step removed from the trial and its witnesses but did not want our audience to become lost in contorted descriptions of who and what, and who said what to whom when. It was, on the surface, a seemingly straightforward language issue, which became complex when linked back to the troubled relationship between the 'now' and the 'then'. The struggle to find the 'right' voice when rendering the past is common in historical fiction, with one manifestation labelled as "bygonese" by David Mitchell, a term Bryony Stocker employs to ask the question "Is this really the authentic language of historical fiction?" (Stocker, 2012, p. 313). It is a question that points to the dynamic and difficult relationship between the past and the present, as each one folds into and is created by the other.

Historical biofiction vs sonic biography

Kellinde Wrightson's three-part historical novel *The Notorious Frances Thwaites* (2014) takes a different approach to this same Frances Knorr story and as such serves as a useful point of contrast to the *Baby Farming Murderess* radio program. Wrightson spent three years researching Thwaites/Knorr (Thwaites was Knorr's family name), during which time she became particularly excited about Knorr's letters, and anything that could help her get inside the head of her century-old subject (2016, p. 1). One of the most important pieces of primary source material that Wrightson discovered was a photo of Knorr – a prison mugshot taken at Darlinghurst Gaol in 1889. In *Traces* magazine Wrightson says:

> She [Knorr] was newly arrived in Sydney and pretty green as far as things went. She looks perplexed and disappointed. This was the photo I looked at for all those years while I wrote her story. This is the photo that appears in the front of the novel. … She wasn't a monster. She was a young mother trying to get by. It's the real Frances I'm interested in, the one who woke up in the mornings and thought, 'I wonder what today has in store for me!' … There was a point at which I became her as much as possible. I was so far gone into her mind, her crazy world, that I felt like her. (Wrightson, 2016, p. 2)

This technique of getting 'into her mind' was not the approach taken by the radio-drama, although the issue of Knorr's innocence did become an important one later. As radio producers, we did not attempt to channel Knorr through her letters; the comparatively short production

time, plus the limitations, of what can be crammed into one feature documentary slot, meant that it was simply impractical. Also, it would have made the whole project into a different beast. This is why we stayed with the initial impetus of the program as a performance-piece, exploring the connection between the newspaper accounts of Knorr's story, and contemporary music – a connection we hoped would help to uncover the fluid relationship between these two different, but sympathetic, ways of conveying meaning. From a theoretical point of view this could be described as a biographical equivalent to 'sonic geography', a research method which reinterprets place by drawing connections between the imagination, performance and sound recording (Bull & Back, 2016; Gallagher, 2014; Makagon & Neumann, 2009). It is an idea that is supported by Ross Gibson, who notes that the word 'record' is a word drawn from the Latin for 'heart', as in 'coeur', 'courage' and 'corazon' (2017, p. 36-37). His full definition of the term is as follows:

> TO RECORD: to bring something back to and through the heart, to put out and bring back a pulse of vitality, a mark made by past exertion, a flush in-and-out that connects the past through the present to the next, future moment. (Gibson, 2017, pp. 36-37)

This definition not only speaks to the idea of sonic biography, but also to the affective presence of recordings, when they loop back from the past into the present bringing with them what Gallagher calls a sense of "audio drift" (2014, p. 468). It is a kind of displacement/replacement listening, where the recording of the sonic environment is also the creation of a new frequency (Gallagher, 2014, p. 468). For this powerful effect to be experienced most fully, it is necessary to have a certain emotional distance from the story itself. We did not want the listeners, as Wrightson imagined she was, to be *inside* Knorr's head. Instead, we wanted them to be in Knorr's *space*, and to be aware that they were in Knorr's space as visitors, thus articulating that sense of place as something different from their daily reality. This is a key differentiation from biographical fictions, where the works are often striving to inhabit the protagonist's experience. It shows how, when the mode of representation shifts, for example from words on a page to sound waves, different forces are at play. Thus, the sounds and voices in this piece were not written in the first person. The role they played was more akin to a Greek chorus, standing off to one side and creating poetry from the scene by observing and commentating. There was certainly no extensive background research into the character of Francis Knorr, nor was there any investigation into wider questions surrounding the general psychological make-up of female killers. This was not just because of the time constraints of the production schedule, but because we wanted to use the audio form to do something different. Past contributors to this journal, like Carolyn Beasley, have shown with expert precision how this kind of research filters through into their creative writing and gives it complexity and depth (2016). But this sound performance piece was never intended to be an exercise in psychoanalysing the murderous mother through the prisms of Freud (1991/1933), or Gallop (1982). As a radio producer, I wanted the emphasis to be on sound and language, rather than psychology.

I wanted Knorr to speak, but not through an artificial recreation of her own voice. If we had had Knorr speaking, using her direct voice, it would have needed an actor pretending to be Knorr, which would have framed the project in a very different way. It would have asked the audience to suspend disbelief in a more formal fashion. As it was, the actors were abstract. Together they were the voice of the archive – a trope that radio listeners are familiar with and

accept. Knorr was only in the program in quotation marks in third person. At one point her lines were spoken by a male voice and at another point they were spoken by a female: another auditory cue to listeners that they were not hearing from Knorr directly. The aim of this distancing was also to make Knorr's voice connect more closely with Pour's music, particularly in the moment when Knorr was described as singing the hymn as she went to the gallows. In this moment in the radio program, the hymn, as it was sung by Pour, moved the auditory space from words to music, and thus moved the story from the third person into the first. Suddenly, the radio program *became* Knorr, rather than being *about* Knorr. Then, Pour left the melody of the hymn behind and drowned out the actors' voices with a distinctly Iranian wail of despair, which was both her own and Knorr's. This powerful performance went beyond words. In this moment Pour's vocals seemed to bridge vast tracts of time and place, and as producers we felt that this distance encompassed much about the human condition, and the grief and pain that can accumulate. Thus, the act of including Pour made the story resonate anew. She served as a kind of cross-cultural audio probe – a tuning fork – from which we as listeners could hear the space of the gaol being articulated differently, and ourselves along with it. For some listeners this distinctive voice may have reminded them that they were only visitors to Pour's space and visitors to the gaol.

Last woman hanged?

In her account of the felon Louisa Collins, author Caroline Overington pointed out that female execution stories are important because of what they tell us about who we are today. She dedicated her book on the subject, *Last Woman Hanged* to "the memory of those women who fought so hard to save Louisa, and for so many of the rights that women enjoy today" (Overington, 2014, flyleaf). It is a point further supported by Lucy Sussex in her examination of cultural attitudes surrounding Knorr (1995). Both Collins and Knorr were executed against a backdrop of public protest. The protest in Knorr's case was so great that the hangman, in a fit of angst related to the public outcry, killed himself two days before the event, rather than be the one to put a rope around the neck of a woman (*The Age,* 1894, p. 5). This tragedy then added to the outrage and gave momentum to what was fast becoming a burgeoning suffragette movement – the movement which was to mark the beginning of the end of capital punishment in this country (Overington, 2014, pp. 238-251). In *Last Woman Hanged,* Overington makes the point that Collins died at a time when women were in no sense equal under the law, except when it came to the gallows. It was a time when women could not vote, sit in Parliament, or even act as jurors. Women lived, were charged, and were convicted under the rule of men. Overington used Collins as an example of how far Australia has, and has not, come in the process of granting equal rights to women. In the radio program, however, we wanted the audience to make an even bigger leap. We wanted them to go from a prison in Melbourne in the 1890s to contemporary Iran. But this was a problematic leap as we did not want to 'other' Pour and Iran by presenting the audience with the opportunity to draw a comparison that made 'them' look backward and 'uncivilised', just as 'we' once used to be.

As an Iranian-born, Melbourne-based musician, Pour is intensely aware of the complexity of these issues. She has been playing, singing and performing traditional Persian songs since she

was ten, and now lives in Melbourne, performs with her own band, and sings her own solo compositions, which is something she could not do in Iran.

> In Iran you can be a completely classical Persian musician. The only problem I had was because I was practicing singing as well, and as a woman singer you cannot sing as a soloist. You can only be in choirs or accompanying other singers. (Pour, 2021)

On the surface, Pour's contemporary reality seems reminiscent of an historical time in Australia when there was no space for women to have their say: when they could not speak, except in the third person; when they were spoken about, rather than heard, when they had no access to legal or political power. But in Iran the story is not so simple, as women *do* have a certain limited access to power. Women were granted the right to vote in 1963. They were first admitted to Iranian universities in 1937 and currently there are 17 women in parliament, out of a total of 290 parliamentarians (Regencia, 2016). Yet, they are not allowed to sing solo in public.

In a conversation after the program went to air, Pour questioned this comparison between the 'then' of Australia and the 'now' of Iran, saying that she felt it was very difficult for a woman from the Middle East to find an appropriate way to represent herself in contemporary Australian culture, and that anything she does has to sit alongside overly negative stereotypes (G. Pour, personal communication, July 2016). Therefore, as a musician Pour dislikes saying bad things about Iran, because, she says, "people look at Iran in a certain way" (G. Pour, personal communication, July 2016). Pour knows that there are what she calls "box-sleepers" in Iran – they are essentially people who live on the street, and they *do* sell their children. Pour wanted the two stories to be related, but not overly related, because she felt the whole issue was a very sensitive one. She told me that she hates it when people presume that the West is civilised and Iran is not. And even though these baby farming murders took place in Australia, they took place a long time ago. But, because baby farming does happen in Iran today, and Pour knew about it, she came to the story totally on Knorr's side, with a sympathy and understanding that resonated in her voice, even though she believed Knorr to be guilty. When Pour sat in the gaol and listened to the voices of the actors in her headphones, the sound that she produced was one that was sympathetic to Knorr. When I asked her for permission to quote her views for this article, she said that she came from a position of loving Knorr rather than judging her (G. Pour, personal communication, July 2016) – which is what happens when the past is put to work by the present. It produces affective results that are neither predictable nor consistent, both being impossibly fluid and transitory.

Pushing the fader too far

Needless to say then, when the radio program went to air, we received a variety of responses. Some were compliments and some were complaints. The most concerning complaint was about the background music and Pour being too loud and drowning out the voice of the actors. This is always a difficult thing to judge because everyone who listens to the radio listens in a different environment, with different speakers, with different expectations, and with culturally

determined ears. All we as producers can do is what we think is right based on past experience and hope for the best. In this instance, because of the experimental nature of the *Soundproof* slot, we put slightly more emphasis on the sound design and less on the spoken word when it came to the final mix. So, at the critical point in the moment when Knorr, singing her hymn, stepped forward towards the noose, Pour was allowed to drown out the narrative. It was a deliberate act of sabotage. It points to the impossibility of capturing or rendering the past life, as well as privileging the present over the past. We wanted to frustrate listeners. We wanted it to be difficult for them to hear the words in this moment, hoping it would make them tense, drawing them in and therefore more conscious of what was going on, above and beyond this moment, while they were also in it. We wanted to give voice to something beyond the personal pain of Knorr. However, there is the chance that maybe the music was too loud, and the fader was pushed too far up, and as we lost focus on Knorr we lost some of our listeners. I do not know for sure, but my guess is that the complaint about the music being too loud came from a listener with an English-speaking background, whose ears were focused on the empirical meaning of the words, more than the more abstract meaning of the sounds. The point at which Pour's music and vocalised wail drowned out the actors' words was during the last sentence of this section of script:

> **Voice 2:** As was customary the sheriff asked the woman if she had anything to say.
>
> **Voice 1:** He put the question to the condemned so that all could hear.
>
> **Voice 2:** 'Have you anything to say?' He received the answer,
>
> **Voice 1:** 'Yes, the Lord is with me.' After beginning in a whisper, the woman's last words were spoken in a full clear voice.
>
> **Voice 2:** 'Yes, the Lord is with me. I do not fear what man can do to me, for I have peace, perfect peace.'
>
> **Voice 1:** Roberts, the chief hangman, adjusted the noose.
>
> **Voice 2:** The sheriff gave the signal.
>
> **Voice 1:** The bolt was drawn.
>
> **Voice 2:** The woman fell 7 feet 6 inches.

As I mentioned earlier, Pour was improvising, and the cry she let out at this point surprised and shook me. We wanted to preserve this surprise and shock in the final mix. We could have toned it down, but we did not, so the words 'the woman fell 7 feet 6 inches' were obliterated. For me, who already knew the story, this was no great loss, but listeners hearing the tale for the first time felt they had missed an important detail, one which mattered, and which connected them to the past and to the facts. We had inadvertently messed with the 'authenticity effect'. Some listeners believed that the narrative detail they had missed – *7 feet 6 inches* – was one drawn from the primary source material and was therefore more important than Pour's cry. Although from a production point of view, given the impossibility of capturing the 'real' life of the

historical figure, we felt as if we were not drowning out any particular truth by favouring Pour's cry, rather than a technical, but gruesome detail. We were exploring the method of the 'truth's' delivery. From our point of view, we were being more honest. Yet, paradoxically, this created a feeling of mistrust. This tiny, compelling, clinical detail, *7 feet 6 inches*, made the scene cold, old and domestic, in a way that could have only come from a time when journalists were asked to look death in the face and routinely report on how it was done. Perhaps, because of the program's short duration, we were packing too much into a single moment. We thought we were creating a sound piece that operated on several levels all at once. We may just have been creating a mess.

In short there were two problems at work here. The first relates to how ears cope with multiple layers of sound. The second hinges around audience expectations, that is, what listeners want, what they expect, and how program makers withhold or deliver on those expectations. This second problem was the more crucial one and is important for anyone thinking through issues surrounding historical biofiction, because it touches on the social contract between the storyteller and the story-receiver. It points to the question *why?* Why do listeners want what they want? Why do they have these ideas about what makes the story work? Where do these ideas come from? From other fictions? And is this why then we, as creative storytellers, wanted to do something different?

Specific details like *7 feet 6 inches* give an insight into how, I imagine, the eye-witness reporters at the time would have dealt with such things – clinically. And my guess is that this is what the radio audience wanted to know, so that they could learn something from listening to the story. Not about Knorr, but about how to cope with being forced into a grim situation. This is the payoff. For their time and attention listeners expect a nugget of wisdom. But which nugget? The newspaper accounts of the day describe her composure as she approached the gallows, suggesting that Knorr herself understood that this public hanging, her own execution, was a kind of performance. In this moment she had an audience, she had a stage, and she had a song. Singing was the only way she could make herself heard. As program makers, we chose to emphasise Pour's cry because, at that moment, the more complex and interesting message for us was Knorr's plight.

Conclusion

As a consequence of all this, what finally survives, in all accounts and through all the confusion, is Knorr's humanity. What both Wrightson and Pour felt, at some point, is that they became Knorr, and that the voice of this young mother who was about to be, perhaps unjustly, hanged was somehow connected to them. Wrightson did this through the act of writing and Pour through the act of making music. Can it also be done through the act of reading, and the act of listening? As we have seen, this depends on perception, following Padmore, who suggests this act of 'authenticity' cannot be instilled into the text itself (Padmore, 2017). The exercise then, in the case of this radio program, came down to one of sonic biography. When we put an Iranian musician into an Australian gaol, the Knorr story *was* heard differently, but that difference was impossible to control or even to map, as the results were vastly different for different people.

With the tools at hand then, how can the success of this radio version of the story be determined? In this case, all that can be said is that the program achieved its own aims, and that the impact of the 'baby farming' episode still resonates, not just because it adds to an understanding and feeling for Knorr and her times, and tells us about contemporary issues, but also because it adds to an understanding of sonic biography and the way this form uses unique tools when it comes to recruiting the past for resurrection in the present.

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