The Other Side of Silence:

Using fiction to explore the resources and limitations in writing about women's lives.

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

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Abstract

This dissertation consists of two distinct components: a creative manuscript, titled “The Other Side of Silence,” and an accompanying exegesis. Both pieces endeavour to answer key questions: What are the different ways fiction might be used to write about the life of a woman from the past? How might we write about such women, taking into account the constraints by which their stories have been forgotten, omitted or displaced? And what are the implications of foregrounding such silences in the writing and reading of narratives?

“The Other Side of Silence” tells the story of Alba, an Italian woman who, with her young family, is leaving her hometown of Salerno for Australia in 1952. The narrative focuses on Alba’s relationship with her mother, Serafina, who fears that Alba’s journey to Australia is motivated by a desire to distance herself from her past. Within this narrative I explore how each of these characters views and consequently deals with the past.

The exegesis discusses several texts that have influenced and inspired “The Other Side of Silence.” In reading contemporary texts about the lives of women in the past, I noted two distinct approaches in the ways women’s stories were written. Some writers use recuperative strategies that allow them to tell stories previously omitted from or distorted by historical discourse and dominant cultural ideologies. By contrast, other writers use poststructuralist narrative strategies to foreground the ways in which traditional realist narratives gloss over the gaps, contradictions and omissions in women’s stories. These alternative narratives indicate how revelation and closure in traditional realism can preclude the probing of some subtle and significant questions about narrating and making sense of women’s experiences. The exegesis examines the
different ways writers have challenged and subsequently enlarged conventional notions of realist fiction to imagine and speculate on the possibilities for and limitations on narrative.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................6

The Other Side of Silence ........................................................7

Exegesis ...............................................................................205

By way of an introduction .......................................................206

Chapter One: Women’s Historical Fiction .................................218

Chapter Two: Carol Shields and the Critique of Realist Fiction ....252

Chapter Three: Writing “The Other Side of Silence” ..................284

Conclusion ...........................................................................313

Bibliography .........................................................................316
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