

Tracing the Girls: Reimagining the immigrant past

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Abstract: On 19 January 1898 Kate Teehan disembarked from the S.S. Wolloomoolloo at Fremantle. She and Kitty Page, who arrived here in 1901, are but two out of the approximately 1,700 single women who came to West Australia from Great Britain between 1849 and the early 1900s.

This paper describes a reimagining of their stories; a practice-led research journey towards a piece of short fiction that unsettles the dominant narrative of single female immigration—that is, good but poverty-stricken lass boards a ship for Australia where she works briefly before marrying well. While this narrative accurately describes the trajectory of Kitty Page, it fails to encompass the experience of Kate Teehan, an immigrant woman, multiply marginalised by gender, class, illiteracy and poor mental health.

Key words: single female immigration to Western Australia 1890-1905; practice-led research; short fiction.



Richard Godfrey Rivers, *Under the Jacaranda*, 1903, oil on canvas, 143.4 x 107.2 cm, purchased 1903, collection: Queensland Art Gallery. Image courtesy: QAGOMA.

Richard Godfrey Rivers' painting *Under the Jacaranda* (1903) depicts the artist and his wife, Selina, taking afternoon tea under what is thought to have been the first Jacaranda tree planted in Australia (Millner, 2014, pp.174-175; Tiffin, 1988, p.88). *Under the Jacaranda* provides a valuable insight into the lifestyle and aspirations of Australia's burgeoning middle class at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, the Brisbane scene depicted here seems to be aping the manners and mores of British high society in a very minor way when compared to images of the Fremantle Hunt Club enjoying afternoon tea on the tennis courts at the Stirlings' Claremont home in West Australia¹ around 1900 (Bolton and Gregory, 1999, p.77). Of immediate interest to this discussion is the young woman in the centre of Rivers' painting. Dressed in formal black and white to mark her servant status is a young woman whose name I have not anywhere seen recorded. We do not know who she is, where she was born, or how she came to be serving tea to Godfrey and Selina Rivers. We do know that between 1860 and 1900 almost 90,000 single British women accepted an assisted passage to one of the six Australian colonies in order to work as domestic servants (Gothard, 2001, p.2). 1,700 of these young women came to West Australia.

Two of these women are the subject of a short fiction narrative I am developing as part of a practice-led PhD in Creative Writing. *Tracing the Girls* (working title) is an attempt to reimagine, through creative research, the lived reality of Kate Teehan who arrived in

West Australia in 1898 and Kitty Page who arrived in 1901. The aim of the piece is to unsettle the dominant narrative of single female immigration—that is, good but poverty-stricken lass boards a ship for Australia where she works briefly before marrying well.² While this narrative accurately describes the trajectory of Kitty Page, it fails to encompass the experience of Kate Teehan, an immigrant woman, multiply marginalised by gender, class, illiteracy and poor mental health.

Kate Teehan and Kitty Page, who I rename Eva and Bridie in order to reimagine their past as short fiction, arrived at the tail end of the Pre-Federation period in which West Australia accepted assisted female migrants. Following the discovery of gold at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie in the 1880s, Perth went from “makeshift to made it” (Mackay, 2016, p.46) and the population of West Australia exploded from 29,000 in 1880 to 288,000 in 1910 (Hetherington, 2009, p.130). A rapidly developing social elite, and those who aspired to be like them, fuelled demand for domestic servants. Kate Teehan, who arrived in 1898, and Kitty Page, who arrived in 1901, came to work in Perth just as West Australia’s first boom period was ending. From shipping lists, it is apparent that both girls were Irish but that is where the similarity ends. While Kitty Page left posterity a photograph, a shipboard journal and two letters to her mother, Kate Teehan died without leaving any firsthand trace of herself. Official documents, a few newspaper accounts of her death and sparse notes that outside observers, such as Miss Monk, the shipboard matron, made are all that remain of Kate Teehan’s life on board ship and in West Australia.

Perth, April.

On a late summer’s day in 1899, Bridie Macken sat up straight and still in a darkened photography studio, looked unsmilingly at the camera and was rewarded, eventually, with a black and white photograph that showed her to advantage. This image of her, in a new dress with fashionable leg of mutton sleeves, her hair piled high on her head and her chin tilted slightly, was to be a present for her mother.

Bridie slipped the photograph into an envelope and wrote an accompanying letter in which she spoke of her place of employment, her wages and pastimes and the black grace of West Australia’s swans which are perpetually a surprise to her. She did not mention the business with Eva, thinking that it would only bring darkness to her mother’s eyes. Instead, what her mother will see from the photograph is that she, Bridie, has arrived already into a better future.³

Historical accounts of the women who came to Australia to work as domestic servants rely on colonial records that were kept in order to select, protect and receive them (Gothard, 2001, p.viii). Firsthand accounts of the women’s experience survive only as shipboard journals, diaries and letters penned by middle-class immigrants and philanthropists. These do not reflect the experience of working class girls like Kate Teehan who were largely illiterate due to their lack of access to education. Marxist-feminist historians such as Charlotte Macdonald (1990) and Jan Gothard (2001), who have provided the most comprehensive surveys of the female immigration schemes to Australasia, explore the way that societal structures impacted the emigrating women. In

particular, they describe the effect of benevolent maternalism as it was implemented by middle class women's organisations such as the United British Women's Emigration Association and the British Ladies' Female Emigration Society, as well as government officials in Great Britain, prior to departure, and in Australia and New Zealand, after arrival.

Disembarking in West Australia in the late 1890s and early 1900s, Kate Teehan and Kitty Page experienced the three-fold system of selection, protection and reception at its height. By this time, pre-selected groups of single women travelled to West Australia under the care of a ship board matron such as Mary Pittman Monk (Fairweather and Hayes, 2013a, p.213; Gothard, 2001, p.84) who served as the girls' chaperone. Upon arrival the girls were received at an Immigrant Depot in Goderich Street, Perth, which served concurrently as the Women's Home and Poor House. Visitors other than ministers of religion were discouraged and "although the women could apply to leave the Poor House they were treated very much like prisoners and compelled to work hard while they were there" (Hetherington, 2009, p.115).

Perth, 20-21 January.

As they approached it from the road the girls saw that the Immigrant Depot was a long two storey brick building with outward opening windows, only the top level of which could be seen above a high wooden fence. Conducted through the main entrance, the girls were shown in to a dusty yard where a pile of wooden planks rested at one end and a row of W.C.s lined the other. Here the Matron, Mrs Cullen, greeted Miss Monk warmly, while the existing residents stood in an untidy group, wearing what looked like a general servant's uniform; long dark sleeves under pinafores that shone with such brilliance in the hot January light that the immigrant girls found themselves blinking under the curious gaze of their owners. Eva was reminded of the orphanage she had come from, and Bridie was not surprised to later discover that Mrs Cullen was a widow with four children, and that the Immigrant Depot did double service as a Poor House and Women's Home.

Following Miss Monk's departure the girls were shown into a long room divided into sections by means of simple wooden partitions. Each compartment was sufficiently large to accommodate three girls. Wooden slat beds, devoid of bed clothes stood ready on a scrubbed stone floor. Despite the windows all standing open the atmosphere indoors seemed hot and airless. Looking around at the stable-like accommodation Bridie thought that calling this place a "home" was a bit of a stretch considering it was barren of soft furnishing, or any other decorative element that might render it inviting. Clearly the Colonial Secretary does not mean for us to become comfortable here, she thought. Out loud she said –

"Come girls. If we take these stalls side by side and top 'n tail the beds we can all stay together for one more night."

As soon as the last four words were out of her mouth Bridie wished with all her heart to call them back, for in the faces of her companions she saw the same fear that lay

unspoken in herself. She encouraged them too quickly to arrange their things, as though bustling about might turn their minds away from the uncertainties and fears that lay in all their hearts. Bridie knew that no one could, at this moment, tell them what would become of them in the morning or how they would be getting on in the colony a week from now, let alone what the long wide future held in store for each of them.

Control or protection of the women at each stage of their emigration “had many faces: protection of immigrant women from physical and moral danger, protection of the colonial government investment in domestic labour, and protection of colonial homes from ‘contamination’ through contact with ‘immoral’ women” (Gothard, 2001, p.viii). The underlying assumption of contemporary middle class philanthropists and government officials was that the women would be safe upon their arrival at the private homes in which they were to serve. Danger would attend them only while travelling alone. Emigration proponents overlooked the fact that living and working in private homes, the women were *still* alone and, I would suggest, vulnerable to what we would today acknowledge and name as sexual predation. Employers were not screened, although hoteliers were not permitted to hire staff directly from the Immigrant Depot (Gothard, 2001, p.84), and no checks and balances existed to ensure that the women were safe from sexual abuse within the private homes that served both as workplace and domicile. Alone in a country where she had no family network, a young woman had no one to turn to if she found her position to be intolerable. Significantly, opponents of these immigration schemes for single women, such as the Agent General for West Australia, Sir Malcolm Fraser, based in London until 1898, felt that migration within a family group or migrating to join family members already resident in the colony was preferable to emigrating alone (Gothard, 2001, p.87).

Claremont, 24 January.

Eva and Mrs Price descended from the railway platform at Claremont on the Shenton Road side, opposite Butler’s Swamp which exuded at all hours a stench of mud, ooze and rotting vegetation. Encountering the smell for the first time, Eva put one hand up to her face and faltered under the weight of her trunk, even though it held little. Mrs Price announced in a bracing voice and with an accent Eva was coming to associate with Australia,

“The smell gets bad but it’s nothing to the insects.”

Alighting as they had the women stood with their backs to the iridescent glory of Freshwater Bay; its jetties and picnic areas and the splendour of the Osborne Hotel. That she had alighted in a pretty water-side village and that the Friendly Society rooms were but two blocks away from her new address was something Eva was quite unable to realize.

In Shenton Road a scant half dozen houses had been built. The Prices’ house was the farthest from the corner, and the handsome limestone block and terracotta railway station which had itself only recently been completed. On the Southern side of the Price

property there was no neighbouring home, only the bare dirt road, the bright sky and the flat summer browns of the swamp across the street.

As she stepped into the shade of the narrow hall Eva felt anxiety once again enclose her, as if a dark swarm of insects had already come inside. When Mrs Price closed the door behind them Eva realized that she would be the sole servant in the house.

The work begun by Macdonald and Gothard in the 1990s and 2000s is now being enriched by the work of inter-disciplinary feminist scholars like Amanda Gardiner who cites Jacques Derrida as her theoretical inspiration, the Magdalena Group as her context and arts-based approaches from sociology as her preferred feminist methodology (Gardiner, 2015, p.3). In her essay “Wet their Bones with Sweat and Blood, Knit their Bones with Me” (2015) Gardiner describes the arts-based feminist methodology that underpinned her PhD, completed the previous year.⁴ Gardiner’s study focuses on the archival remains of 55 single women (1829-1901) who secretly carried and killed their “unlicensed children” (Swain and Howe, cited in Gardiner, 2015, p.2). From Gardiner’s study, it is possible to see that single women in West Australia were at times sexually abused and raped, and that the society of nineteenth century West Australia did not accept unlicensed sexual behaviour from young women. It was assumed that any rupture of the polite boundary between sexes occurred because the young woman’s morals were suspect, making it impossible for victims to seek help. The women in Gardiner’s study, desperate to remain on the right side of the moral divide, hid their pregnancies and killed their “unlicensed” children. The women’s embodied experience, their pain, and the pain of their children has been suppressed, Gardiner argues, by the nature of colonial record-keeping. She poses the question, “if there is no archive should there be no history?” (Gardiner, 2014, p.7).

Gardiner’s work not only evidences that some single women in West Australia engaged in domestic service were sexually abused and raped, but describes how she utilised an arts-based methodology to continue her work in the absence of comprehensive archival remains. Gardiner’s approach was to interweave three voices in the telling of Mary Summerland’s story—just one story out of the 55 cases she uncovered. The first voice in Mary’s story provides a historical non-fiction narration, “the second is musing, a reflexive examination of [Gardiner’s] own knowledge making” (Gardiner, 2015, p.1) and the third voice is “a fictionalized imagining” (Gardiner, 2015, p.1) that comes into being by virtue of the space between what Gardiner knows from the archival remains of Mary’s story, and what Gardiner senses her embodied experience might have been.

In order to begin *Tracing the Girls*, I undertook the traditional archival searches. Newspapers, ships lists, shipboard journals, letters and police files were all grist to the mill but, as I anticipated, I found little trace of Kate Teehan’s embodied experience. It was as I procrastinated, and drew back from beginning my creative response to the archive, that Ross Gibson’s (2012) reimagining of William Dawes at Sydney Cove came to my attention. Working from scant archival remains, albeit that they are in Dawes’ own hand, Gibson wrote: “Where the most important relationships are not explicit in the records, they might be implicit in the absences” (Gibson, 2012, p.134).

Gardiner and Gibson alerted me to the idea that I might develop a “speculative biography” (Gibson, 2012, p.134). This was both an exciting and frightening idea. As a

historian, inhabiting a post-truth world, I was wary of stepping off into the unknown and unknowable, of departing from my disciplined adherence to evidence and of producing something that might be mistaken for 'history.' As a fiction writer I was excited by the possibilities of this more speculative approach, and as a feminist scholar I could not pass up the opportunity to explore the central question—what happened to Kate Teehan? I wanted to further explore Kate's life and agency, to spend time with her, to explore the meaning of comments like "slow" (Monk, 1897). I wanted to tell one possible version of Kate's story.

In deference to the feelings of family members, albeit that I do not know who they are or even whether they exist, I decided to set the short fiction narrative in 1899; to invent a name for the ship that the girls arrived on; to create composite characters; and to change the names of the girls' employers, the staff at the Immigrant Depot, and police personnel. Only Miss Monk appears in my story wearing her own name, for she was an Australasian institution. The key event, Kate's suicide remains, of course, central to the fiction narrative.

A suicide of an unusually horrifying nature took place at the Women's Depot, in Goderich Street, yesterday morning. A young woman named Kate Teehan, who was one of the batch of immigrants who arrived in the colony from England a few weeks ago, had been staying at the depot while awaiting engagement as a domestic servant. Yesterday morning at about seven o'clock, she dressed herself, and after carefully saturating her clothes with kerosene, retired to an outhouse and applied a match to them. In a moment she was a mass of flames, and before any assistance could be rendered she had been burned beyond recovery. She was immediately conveyed to the hospital, where she lingered in great agony until a few minutes after nine o'clock, when she died. No reason can be assigned to the rash action, but the woman is said to have been somewhat eccentric in her behaviour. This opinion was formed by the hospital authorities during a two-day sojourn (Suicide, 1898, p.2)

Perth, 8 February.

"Are you Miss Bridget Macken?"

"Yes, Constable. I am."

"And did you arrive here on the S.S. Wyndham, January 19 of this year?"

"I did, Constable."

Bridie took her eyes off P.C. Bremworth for a moment to look across at her employer who was standing behind and to one side of him. Bridie had not served in the house long enough to be able to read Mrs Marshall's gaze and looked to her now, in the absence of a closer ally, for some sign, some hint of reassurance but Mrs Marshall's

tall frame was unbending and her lips, pressed together as they were, reminded Bridie of a reluctant cockle which, having been plucked summarily from its tidal home had no intention of ever re-opening its mouth.

“Are you listening now, Bridget?”

The soft, grave tone of his voice caused Bridie to look back at him, as though he were the parish Priest at home. She nodded her head,

“Yes, Constable.”

“I need you to tell me the truth now, for it concerns one of you girls.”

There had been sixty girls on the voyage out with Bridie, most of them English, all of them single and all of them bound to pay for their free outward passage with a year of domestic service in the Swan River Colony. At the policeman's words, Bridie's thoughts flew swiftly to the other seven girls of The Irish Watch, the girls she had eat and slept and larked about with on the shipboard journey; Eva, Kate, Hannah, Mary, Kitty, Maggie and Ellen. For forty-three days they had been like sisters to each other and Bridie often felt a pang of loss at the way they had all now been scattered. She, Kate, Hannah, Maggie, Ellen and Eva had each gone to employment in Perth houses, so might at least be afforded some opportunity to meet one another at Friendly Society gatherings, but Kitty and Mary had gone to work at a dairy in Guildford and Bridie felt that in all probability she would never see them again.

She was not surprised that P.C. Bremworth had come to ask her about the Irish girls, for she had been the leader of their Watch on board ship, but whatever could she tell him of them now, nearly a month after they had parted? Fixing her grey eyes to the policeman's own Bridie replied –

“I will tell you what I know, Constable.”

“Was Eva Collins known to you on board?”

“Yes, Constable.”

“And are you aware that Eva Collins died yesterday in hospital?”

“That cannot be the same girl, sir. Eva has gone to work at Claremont. I visited her at The Depot on the Sunday before she was to be collected. And that was only a fortnight ago.”

As Kate and Kitty morphed into Eva and Bridie, and I gradually began writing their story, I became fascinated by the girls' creativity and resourcefulness. I did not want to represent Eva solely as a victim. I turned the archival information over and over in my mind, deliberating. Apparently she had purposefully set fire to herself. Was the journalist being sensationalist, I wondered? Could this have been an accident? There are kitchen and hotel fires aplenty in the Police General Files for the period. And surely women were more inclined to use poison, or if nothing toxic were available, to jump

down a well? Evidence of women using both these means to commit suicide in Claremont in 1895-1900 are evidenced in the Police Occurrence books for the period (Bolton and Gregory, 1999, p.75; Gothard, 2001, p.204). I requested Kate Teehan's death certificate in the hopes that the Coroner might have questioned the suicide finding but he was categorical: "Cause of Death—From the effect of a severe burn which was self-inflicted while in a state of unsound mind."

The assertion that Kate suffered poor mental health also led to a period of Gardiner-like musing. Kate is described in the archives as "slow" (Monk, 1897), as "showing signs of weakness of intellect" (Shocking Suicide, 1898, p.47) and "eccentric" (Suicide, 1898, p.2). How were these opinions formed? What did Kate's behaviour look like? Considering that she was accepted into a selective emigration scheme in the late 1890s, she must have presented reasonably during the selection process. Perhaps if Kate were living in today's world she would be diagnosed with poor executive function and a range of processing problems symptomatic of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (see Symptoms of ADHD, 2016).

If Kate had an inattentive form of ADHD with a tendency to become anxious and depressed, she would have been especially vulnerable to the exigencies of migration, and a less than competitive candidate for domestic service. Still, I felt that this was not sufficient to explain her swift decline upon being returned to the Immigrant Depot. Kate Teehan burned herself to death just *eight* days after coming back to Perth. What might have caused her to feel so desperate?

Perth, 9 February.

"Am I correct in thinking that you met Eva while still in Ireland, that you travelled to London together and boarded the S.S. Wyndham together?"

"Yes, Constable. From Dublin as my family live nearby and Eva was living in Dublin itself."

"What did you think of Eva when you first met her?"

"We were all homesick in the beginning and then we became ill....and it was very discombobulating to be at sea."

"But there was never anything about Eva that made you think that she was more melancholy than the rest of you?"

Bridie did not reply to Constable Bremworth's question immediately, recalling how, a few days after the weather settled and the girls were feeling better, Miss Monk and the Captain had arranged for them to take a gentle dinner of beef tea, bread and biscuits on the poop deck. Here they had been segregated from the saloon and kitchen which, busy with the activities of men in varying states of mannerliness and inebriation, Miss Monk felt to exude an atmosphere unlikely to enhance the good character of her

charges. When the time came to gather for the meal, Eva had remained below so that Bridie was forced to go down to look for her.

Eva had not stirred as Bridie approached their compartment but remained stooped at one of the long tables customarily used for meals. The room had smelt unpleasantly of sea-sickness.

"It's very nice outside, Eva."

Eva had made no sign that she had heard her, continuing to look down at her hands which were, Bridie had then seen, engaged with some activity that caused the tip of Eva's tongue to peek out the corner of her mouth. With her red hair and gentle features Eva reminded Bridie of a match, a flame, though she had none of a flame's quick brilliance.

"Eva," she had tried again. "Eva. Miss Monk is asking for you upstairs."

Her lack of response had not surprised Bridie a second time but she had felt a growing urgency for them both. She knew that if they did not move quickly, to rejoin the girlish crowd on the poop deck, another of Miss Monk's charges would be sent to find them and that Miss Monk would have cause to note in her shipboard diary that not all the girls were obedient. A copper plate remark such as this against your name would, Bridie knew, make it doubly hard to get work in the colony upon arrival. Moving closer she could see that Eva held a small white object and a knife. Her voice, when it came sounded flat, as though all the air had been kicked out of it,

"We will never go back will we?" Eva had said, still looking down at her hands which were busy below the table.

It was a statement although it sounded like a question.

"Have I been that bad that they should send me away?"

The depth of appeal in Eva's words shook Bridie who had not thought too much about Eva's past. Instinctively she had sought to reassure her.

"No," she had said, watching Eva, whose cheeks were flushed. "I'm sure not."

At Bridie's words the limp and crooked line of Eva's mouth had set firm and she had straightened up.

"Are you alright to go now?"

Instead of answering her, Eva had slipped one hand, together with its contents, into the pocket of her pinafore, gathered up her mug and spoon with the other and moved towards the door. Sticking together, they had made their way wordlessly along the narrow passage, up the wooden steps and out from between the decks into the light.

"No," said Bridie out loud to the policeman. "Eva was as she was."

Today we understand that suicide results from several factors. The most common factor is a pre-existing mental health issue and/or one of the following: “Anniversary of someone else’s suicide; pregnancy or fear of pregnancy; loss of freedom (incarceration); physical or sexual abuse; taunting or humiliation by peers; loss of self esteem; actual, perceived or anticipated humiliation, reprimand, parental disappointment or disapproval” (see Factors and Triggers for Suicidal Behaviour in Youth, 2009). I reasoned that Kate might be suffering from ADHD with related anxiety and/or depression. It may be that she never fully understood or accepted the reasons why she had to leave Ireland, in the same way that the child migrants of later years did not (Humphreys, 2011). When she was returned to the Immigrant Depot from Claremont, she would have understood herself to be unemployed and, given her depressed state, again unwanted. Finding herself virtually incarcerated with inhabitants who would, by then, have viewed her as unemployable, Kate’s self-esteem was likely to have plummeted. This would have meant that Kate, already struggling with her mental well-being, was impacted by four out of the seven factors that commonly lead a vulnerable young person, aged 15-25 to suicide today. Considering Kate’s lack of social status, as a young female servant living in 1890s West Australia, and given the silence that surrounded the “unlicensed” actions of the young women brought to light by Gardiner’s study, it is difficult to rule out the possibility that Kate was sexually abused or raped while staying at Claremont.

“Where the most important relationships are not explicit in the records, they might be implicit in the absences,” writes Gibson (2012, p.134). Kate’s death was not investigated with the thoroughness or empathy that I have suggested in these excerpts; there was no Bridie and no P.C. Bremworth in real life. The Police Department General Files for 7 to 10 February show that the Police were not made aware of Kate’s self-immolation at the Immigrant Depot around 7 a.m., until 10.30 p.m. that night. There is no document extant that suggests that Kate’s previous employer was interviewed, or the Matron of the Immigrant Depot, or Miss Monk (the shipboard Matron), or any of the immigrant girls. It seems as if nobody wanted to know why Kate might be feeling suicidal. If, perhaps, something specific had gone wrong in the private and domestic space in which Kate was sent to work, no one wanted to hear about it. The ‘fiction’ that I have written is informed by what I have found in the archives and imagined after attending to the patterns of absence there.

Claremont, 28 January.

Eva was relieved to discover that Mr and Mrs Price had three young children for her to look after. There was also another, an older boy named John.

From her first days in the house Eva committed to establishing a routine and Mrs Price, who was expecting another baby, did not, at first, criticize her efforts. Eva rose in the morning and lit the stove so that there was hot water by the time Mr and Mrs Price appeared. Next she shepherded the energetic children through breakfast, in to clothes and out the door to the one-room school. As their chatter receded up the road, she turned her attention to cleaning the house and preparing a meal for Mrs Price to eat at

noon and by Friday she had caught up with the household's laundry, a chore with which the family had fallen woefully behind.

Eva was preparing to press a basket of clean linen on Friday afternoon, when the eldest Price boy appeared unexpectedly and stood in the doorway, casting his shadow across the blanket she had laid over the table for ironing. John, eighteen years old and a head taller than his father, had a job further down the railway line towards Fremantle. Eva was accustomed to him leaving even before she was awake and he usually returned home only slightly before the younger children. His early arrival today made her uneasy, and she moved quickly toward the stove to test the irons with a flick of water from the saucer that she had prepared nearby.

"Aren't you going to wish me good day?" John asked.

Neither of the irons was hot enough for Eva to continue her work, so she moved to shake out one of Mr Price's shirts and greeted John without looking up, hoping that he would realise that she was uncomfortable with him there, and that he should move off.

"You're a dainty little thing."

Eva moved a little further away from him to wait beside the corner cupboard where she barked her shin against an empty tea chest. John moved swiftly then and held his hand over her mouth so that she was forced to taste the sweat and wood sap still on him. Eva bit down hard on his thumb.

"No one will come at this time of day, even if you scream" he said and shoved her roughly toward the table. Eva saw the heavy irons still warming and, quickly twisted her torso to fall out of his reach.

"Don't –" she began holding an arm out in front of her and the other out toward the stove.

"What?" John taunted.

Eva did not stop to answer but swung a hot iron at him and ran out the door, directly to the W.C. where she locked herself in. The small space was hot and stunk worse even than the swamp across the street but she had managed to throw the iron towards him and he did not come after her. Eva dropped her weight on to the edge of the latrine and sat there, sweaty and shaken. After a time she heard the sound of an axe, as John took logs from the pile and split them for the stove; one, two, three blows and a piece fell into sections. She considered the lock on the W.C., a narrow strip of wood dropped into an useless looking catch. She heard John's axe again, another block of wood demolished ...

In the spaces and gaps within the archive, there is the shape of a girl named Kate Teehan. Her shape is preserved by what we can piece together from the archival record. Kate, newly arrived from Ireland and suffering from poor mental health, went to work as a domestic servant in a private home at Claremont. Within a week Kate was returned to the Immigrant Depot and effectively incarcerated. Eight days later, Kate was dead.

Tracing the Girls is one literary response to the girl-shaped space left behind by Kate Teehan.

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Acknowledgements: I am indebted to my supervisors Dr. Deborah Hunn and Dr. Marilyn Metta at Curtin University for their generous support and advice, as well as to Dr. Lucy Dougan, Dr. Philippa Martyr and Dr. Bobbie Oliver, who provided additional comment and encouragement. The short fiction work, *Tracing the Girls*, had its beginning at Varuna, The Writers' House, NSW, where I was a participant in the Short Prose Intensive 2015. I am indebted to everyone concerned for their hospitality and encouragement. Thanks are also due to the staff of the State Library of Western Australia, Battye Library and the State Records Office of Western Australia. Thank you too to my PhD colleagues at The Hub.

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship and Curtin University Post Graduate Scholarship.

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¹ West Australia is used to refer to the contemporary State of Western Australia throughout this article as the fiction work under discussion is set in the pre-Federation period, the years immediately prior to 1901.

² Charlotte Macdonald in New Zealand has already gone some way towards debunking this popular myth, suggesting that it is something of an over-simplification. In her study

of 4,028 single immigrant women to Canterbury in the 1850s and 60s (Macdonald, 1999, p.135), she found that a little over half of them could be traced from passenger list to marriage registrar. Macdonald's evidence suggests that the women married men of a similar class to themselves, and that only "*over the course of a lifetime*, as a result of the joint labor of a married couple, rather than suddenly upon marriage" (Macdonald, 1999, p.148, my italics) did they experience upward social mobility. Western Australian attempts to trace the social destination of the single immigrant women have been limited to date, but suggest a similar pattern (Erickson, 1992, p.151; Fairweather and Hayes 2013b, p.244).

³All italicised fiction excerpts are from Millner (2017).

⁴ See Gardiner (2014). This work is currently embargoed.