

Christine Ellis, *Silver Lies, Golden Truths* (Wakefield Press, 2015)

Silver Lies, Golden Truths is a biography written by Christine Ellis about her grandfather, Reinhold (Jack) Schuster, a German migrant who lived out World War I and World War II in Broken Hill. Jack was born in 1885 in Saxony, Germany. In 1912 he found work as a trimmer on a steamship bound for Australia. When the ship docked in Perth, Jack was fed up with being confined to the boat and jumped overboard to swim ashore in order to explore Perth. While it is not known whether Jack intended to stay put or if he simply missed the ship once it moved on, thereafter he built a life for himself in outback Australia. Ellis knew she wanted to write her grandfather's story after hearing her mother's stories about him. She chose a narrative form for the biography because she 'wanted to write more than Jack's biography – [she] wanted to tell his story' (293).

It is Jack as a person, rather than the events of Jack's life, that makes this biography an engaging read. Ellis highlights the fact that it is Jack's disposition that enabled him to endure two World Wars as a German in Broken Hill, and she constructs the narrative around Jack's demeanour: 'The Broken Hill legend of Jack Schuster began with Duke's account of his selflessness in helping the injured Italian and grew over the weeks with tales of the small man's strength and dogged hard work' (51). Jack lived in Broken Hill during a time when the community 'was so unwilling to accept its emerging multiculturalism' (57) and whose 'perceived acceptance of foreigners – provided they could speak English – did not extend to the "Afghan" cameleers who lived on the edge of town' (56).

Jack earned the respect of the community despite the community's wariness towards foreigners and, during the wars, towards Germans in particular. The community was trapped between their love and respect of an individual and their hatred for that individual's race as a whole. When Jack, as a foreign alien, obediently registers himself as required at the local police station, he is not imprisoned as other Germans in the community are. In addition, Jack 'had quietly been given his job back at the British Mine, unlike many of the "aliens" along the line of lode' (87). Ellis's portrayal of how well-loved Jack was in the community suggests Jack's qualities as a person saved him from much suffering during the wars.

Ellis tells the first half of the biography from Jack's perspective, but then shifts the narrative focus from Jack to one of Jack's beloved daughters, Maisie. In 1938, Jack returns home to Germany for a few months and Maisie is lost without him:

At school she was used to being without him, but whenever something different happened, such as the school dentist visting or lining up for diphtheria shots, it would envelop her like a black cloud: her father was not home to tell of it and to praise her for her bravery. (223)

The narrative shift occurs so naturally within the story that the transition is hardly noticeable. Ellis recounts stories she heard first-hand from her mother about Jack, and these accounts are the most vivid sections in the biography. Maisie's adoration for her father is unmistakable. In these sections the reader starts to form a more complete picture of Jack.

Ellis mostly achieves her aim to write in narrative form, yet at times she shifts away from the narrative to present the reader with background information. This disrupts the flow of the story and pulls the reader out of the narrative. In 1915, two German prisoners of war who escaped from the Torrens Island internment camp show up on Jack's doorstep asking for help. The two men tell their story to Jack, and Jack agrees to help them. After this, Ellis details the history of the Torrens Island internment camp:

Book reviews: *Silver Lies, Golden Truths* by Christine Ellis. Raelke Grimmer.
Transnational Literature Vol. 8 no. 2, May 2016.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

It is unknown whether Kurt was responsible for the series of events that followed- but, within a short time, Walter Emde's long-lost letter to the American Consul General was found in a bureaucrat's office and finally translated into English. It caused a ripple effect throughout the Australian military and the internment camps. (109)

The history continues on in detail and completely removes the reader from the core narrative. The information is relevant background information in the context of the story, but the way in which Ellis chooses to disseminate the information to the reader seems to stand in contrast to her original intention.

Despite the occasional disruption to the narrative through unnecessary blocks of information, in *Silver Lies, Golden Truths* Ellis paints a complete portrait of her grandfather and the events in his life. It is difficult to get to the end of the story without feeling like this is a man you know, or at the very least one you would like to meet.

Raelke Grimmer