

# Reflection Statement



*“All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.”*

Oscar Wilde

Throughout history, the paradigm of society has fluctuated between ages of reason and ages of spectacle. In a zeitgeist devoid of hope, it is more important than ever to embrace the turmoil of our modern world- embracing it in ourselves, and most integrally, in our art. My performance poetry piece, *Lacrimosa: A Sonata in C Minor*, targets an audience of those lost in the throes of their cataclysmic context, reminding responders who dwell within both the dreadful present and uncertain future, that meaning should never be ascribed to art, as social constructions such as morality are merely tools for an artist when creating a most meaningless masterpiece.

My artistic purpose was to compose a narrative which contributes to the literature within my favourite styles of Gothicism, Romanticism, and Aestheticism. Listening to classical music while brainstorming my major work it seemed my favourite piece by Mozart, *Lacrimosa*, completely captured my synesthetic understanding of Gothicism. Through this, I discovered a rumour that while attempting to produce a requiem for the *Dies Irae* (of which *Lacrimosa* was part), Mozart became so fixated on his composition that it destroyed his mind, killing him before its completion. This obsession with the notion of composition led to my investigation of Aestheticism through Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, largely shaping my perceptions of artistic purpose. Hence, *Lacrimosa* becomes the narrative of a man so enamoured by art that he hubristically separates himself from God in order for his creations to surpass divinity with "a piece so prestigious / It shall transcend the religious". David Schildkret's *Still no Rest for the Requiem: An Enigma Reconsidered* supported my understandings of Mozart's mysterious death and its relationship with the *Dies Irae*, enabling me to synthesise historical conjecture into a story where "the historical aspects [were] an almost incidental backdrop to the novel rather than integral to it."<sup>9</sup>

The *Dies Irae* was to cast an irrevocably powerful spell on me, with the principles of Catholicism strongly resonating with my studies of Seamus Heaney, studied in Extension 1, Worlds of Upheaval.

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, Joanne, and Nancy St. Clair. *The Distant Mirror: Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*. Scarecrow Press, 2005.

The analogous notion of religion as a paradigm of upheaval was particularly noted in *Funeral Rites*, and its biblical and funerary connotations have been captured through my vignette of Mozart's funeral. Imagery evoked from "shackled in rosary beads" and "wax melted down / and veined the candlesticks"<sup>10</sup> is alluded to through "Seven black crows croak cries of caution" and "Seven candlesticks drip from fiery wicks," hence conveying the decadent imagery of gothic opulence.

My fascination with the macabre and Gothic was inspired by my profound adoration for Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, also studied in Extension 1, not only allowing the exploration of genre, but directing thematic interest towards hubris and an ultimate tragic downfall caused by obsession with creation, demonstrated in the direct allusion: "But I did not request thee, maker, / To mould me as man from thy clay", depicting Shelley's metanarrative reference to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Victor Frankenstein's hubristic intent in "I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart"<sup>11</sup> captures the tragic journey which Mozart followed throughout his composition.

Initially taking the short story form, my composition found need for greater self-containment, creating difficulty capturing the chaos of a man's descent into insanity as my research on form highlighted how the disciplined short forces an author to refrain from including "apparently irrelevant episodes", thus allowing "some events [to be] expanded, and others telescoped."<sup>12</sup> Ironically, I found that the telescoping of events was more suited to performance poetry, amplifying the intense bursts of emotions within my narrative. Peter Middleton's book, *Distant reading*, delivered intriguing new insights, as works of performance poetry are spoken of as an "assemblage of micro-histories [that] develops a certain autonomy of its own"<sup>13</sup>, expounding the power of spoken word.

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<sup>10</sup> Heaney, Seamus. *North*. Faber And Faber, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Lackington, 1818.

<sup>12</sup> Stroud, Thomas. *A Critical Approach to the Short Story*. Penn State University Press, 1956.

<sup>13</sup> Middleton, Peter. *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, And Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*. University of Alabama Press, 2005.

After transitioning from the short story form, I realised that my poetry would still need to maintain a narrative structure. To ensure clarity for an audience, I tinkered with structural devices which would “both modulate existing networks of intersubjective relations and articulate new ones.”<sup>14</sup> Challenging the classic Gothic narrative, I fluctuated the tone of my Introduction section to emulate a news report, instantly establishing context for a responder. Further, each section refers to the structural composition of a classical sonata, adding to the differentiation of my structure. The trope of the prophetic dream provided a valuable structural device to advance the narrative of my piece, allowing the connection between motivation and Mozart’s composition through developing unique voices for my characters. My use of both dreams and epistolary devices allowed me to fluidly transition from third person omnipotent voice into the voices of Constanze or Mozart. Inspirations from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, studied during Preliminary Advanced English, provided the impetus for the macabre dream told in the Development sequence of my composition which similarly functioned to instil supernatural tension, witnessed in “writhing with seething wounds weeping”, where my visceral imagery is paired with consonance to emulate the painful groans of tortured souls.

My oratorical enthusiasm was ultimately realised through performance, and texts including Timothy Clark’s *The Theory of Inspiration* enlightened me to how performance is an exceedingly poignant conduit for the most rousing sensations, as even in its origins, “the first uses of poetical language are undoubtedly to be traced into the vehement affections of the mind.”<sup>15</sup> My poignant oration was shaped by Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart*, where sound is used impactfully as a mounting evocation of paranoia is accented by syllabic patterns which mimic a heartbeat, invoking hysteria and a sense of ghastly, uncontrollable emotion which I created through “It bursts through veins with percussive presto. / Pulsing pulmonaries perform this rubato.” Here, intense visceral imagery is paired with the consonance of musical terminology, creating a dynamic tone.

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<sup>14</sup> Middleton, Peter. *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, And Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*. University of Alabama Press, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Clark, Timothy. *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing*. Manchester University Press, 1997.

The musicality of my poetic structure was also enhanced by the motif of musical diction, where the rhythmic syllables and consonance in “pulsing in pizzicato, off-beat hesitations” and “The thumping percussion bashed at his heart-”, reflect cadences similar to those elicited during orchestral performances. My knowledge of performance poetry was further consolidated through attendance of the Randwick Library Slam Poetry Heat which allowed me to also witness the power of internal rhyme and altered syntax, creating “The sheer veneer which conceals horrors of heaven / Is torn twixt fingers of the angels seven.” Here, my anastrophe creates a distinct archaic tone, conclusively bolstering the delivery of my poetry. Hence, my transition into the performance poetry form as I beheld the unique hybridisation of musicality and narratology.

The apotheosis of Mozart’s compositional journey was further inspired by the imagery of Sylvia Plath’s poem, *Fever 103*, as her own biblical references to hellfire and Cerberus helped to establish my perception that the purpose of art is to be something akin to religion. The apocalyptic rapture of the Development section sees “unceasing tri-headed mutts, / Gutturally growling in hot licking tongues”, exemplified my chthonic connotations and consonance which replicated the noise of lapping flames of hell, attempting to mimic the tone created within Plath’s composition. Through religious imagery and metatextual allusions I demonstrate how, in my composition, “art generates a ritual. Instead of taking its place within the sacral sphere, art supplants religion.”<sup>16</sup> The sublime images manifested from hubristic Aestheticism enabled me to depict how grand elements of art can be amplified through Gothic imagery, altogether becoming presented impactfully through a poetic performance. I aspire to perform my composition at a renowned event to a global audience, as the intention of my art is to be shared with those who harbour a fondness for literature.

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<sup>16</sup> Bürger, Peter et al. *Theory of The Avant-Garde*. University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

The undertaking of this capricious and often arduous composition was an immensely valuable and rewarding experience. After endlessly devoting hours of labour and love to craft a work in which I poured so much of my own soul into that it could possibly be considered an extension of my own being - the irony is that in exploring the neurotic tendencies of aestheticism, I may have unintentionally created an allegorical reflection of my own tumultuous, yet liberating, creative process.

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