

## Reflection Statement

*Within this sacred space we stand.*

*Four women. Four stories.*

*Four lives. Four visions.*

*United as one.*

The strength and complexities of women in war have become clear to me as I have uncovered the silenced voices of the female's experience in war. Through my historical non-linear radio drama, *We Will Rise*, I explore the complexity of female involvement in war and seek to challenge gendered depictions, cultural stereotypes and the historical representation of women within the masculine paradigm of war. My research has allowed me to destabilise the mainstream representations of women in war and, instead, unearth and confront complex truths, even if they reveal disturbing and uncomfortable aspects of feminine behaviour. Indeed, this process revealed the ways which I have internalised patriarchal assumptions of female behaviour. My Major Work denies a traditional singular narrative interpretation to consider often tragic; sometimes heroic and sometimes grotesque participation of women in war. Framed within a postmodern war crimes truth commission. I unite four distinct female voices, to illuminate the subjectivity of truth in the nexus between authentic historical evidence and storytelling.

My concept has grown from my passion for feminist theory and desire to challenge the gender bias that has historically plagued past discourses and patriarchal narratives. In the case of dialogue, the language demands a fidelity and authenticity that is essential to the successful imagining of the spoken language. Its origins lie in my desire to capture the misogynistic, paternalistic and infantilising presentation of women, often tinged with recurrent themes of passivity and victimhood. Throughout the Stage 6 English courses, I have explored modernist texts composed in the wake WWI, including, T.S Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922), and Katherine Mansfield's *The Collected Stories* (1918-1920). Such texts invited me to consider the different ways in which we respond to war, giving birth to my original research process wherein I unpacked various war testimonies. My reading of these texts ignited a passion to understand the multitude of female experiences in war. Whilst my work is presented in the form of a radio drama, studies of plays including Arthur Miller's, *The*

*Crucible* (1953), allowed me to appreciate the ways in which composers can appropriate the dramatic form, assisting in shaping the formation of my skills in script writing.

Theoretically, I was informed by Helene Cixous' *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*<sup>1</sup>. Inspired by my reading of *The School of Dreams* I utilise a non-linear and episodic narrative that succeeds in evoking the illusion of spontaneous recollection and reminiscence: "I'll return via my ladder to the first dream of dreams, the one that everyone knows". Furthermore, I was much inspired by Cixous' ideas about dreams and the female experience, as a means of revealing the plurality of female archetypes and their nuances, unexplored within the patriarchal canon. Cixous' extolling of the complex female directly informed the conception of Cassandra, and my pursuit of females as perpetrators in the domain of war literature, in a powerful revision of history. In doing so, this influence inspired me to question pre-existing gender roles and confines through imaginative writing.

Through the evolution of my Major Work, I came to understand the precise nature of the radio drama form and its rich contemporary history. Initially, I listened to a range of published podcasts including the ABC and BBC, to immerse myself in the form; one that I had not realised was so complex and powerful. Particularly influential were; *Ammochostos – Famagusta: Hidden in the Sand* (ABC) *Having It Her Way* (ABC) and Mark Dapin's series, *Myths of War*. Each of these works explored an interplay between multiple voices and a layering of textual forms. From this, I have emulated their use of: archival audio; extracts from poetic texts; dramatic performances; music composition and evocative sound design.

I created four unique female voices: Cassandra, Nellie Jones, Hanna Schmitz and Youko Oshima, born from my determination to reclaim the marginalised voices of women throughout history. The Cassandra of my piece, is an appropriation of the Ancient Greek mythological prophet, found in texts such as Euripides' *The Women of Troy* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. I subvert the ancient portrayal of Cassandra as a woman associated with unleashed madness and instead, present her as a metahistorical presence, whose seer-like judgements resonate and echo through the periods. Throughout the radio drama, Cassandra functions as a "judge" in the fictitious war crimes truth commission and speaks with a poetic diction that emanates from the mythic realm, fundamental to the aesthetic integrity of my piece. My characters are inspired by confluences of historic research, dramatic fiction and

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, *The School of Dreams* and *The School of Roots*

biography. Thus, Nellie, the Australian War Nurse of my piece, is a dramatic invention animated by, in part, the life of Vivian Bullwinkel, whom, although “many thought [her] strange” for her willing and active engagement in war, showed “courage and defiance”, thus confounding androcentric narratives of heroism. Hanna Schmitz embodies and articulates female conduct in war beyond the stereotypical notions of passivity and victimhood: “A female perpetrator/A seeming paradox” as her role in the “League of German Women”, embodies a brutal behaviour, not traditionally associated with femininity. Hanna is based in part on Irma Grese, the SS Belsen Guard executed by the British in 1945<sup>2</sup> I took great care not to diminish the grotesque brutality that women across history in war have been subjected to and the dignity and strength they have exhibited in the face of horror. I emblematised this historic reality through the character of Youko Oshima, whose voice conveys a profound sorrow and disgust, as she speaks with distilled simplicity about the victims of Hiroshima, “whose shadows remained behind” after their bodies had been carbonised.

One of the complexities in the process of construction was my uncertainty around the portrayal of imaginative sonic elements, to convey the key concepts within my Major Work. I pondered sonic elements including the possibility of a recurring motif and layering of acoustics. To resolve this, I made decisions including: Cassandra’s music which bookends the play sourced from the soundtrack of an Ancient Greek play (Medea) performed in Sydney in 1994, created by composer Edward Primrose. The opening and closing sequence utilise a musical cue from this production as I believed the magical sound effects would benefit my composition in its ability to function as a motif to usher in Cassandra, symbolising her power of prophecy through its mythical undertones. The sound of a koto within the presentation of Youko Oshima symbolises the dropping of the atomic bomb and provides a Japanese cultural texture and perspective within a predominantly Eurocentric landscape. In the case of Hanna Schmitz, I played with the musicality of bilingualism, with an undercutting of the texture and horror of Nazi Germany that she participated in. Further, I created synthesised drones to create mood and atmosphere and utilised archival audio sourced from ABC Radio National from the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. This added a powerful dimension to my work, as the archival content was enmeshed with Youko’s spoken text, adding to the ethical debate about America’s intervention in the war.

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<sup>2</sup> The antithetical female brutality of which is explored in Wendy Lower’s historical investigation, *Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*

After experimentation using laptops and phones for recording, I reached out to a local college of sound engineering to seek assistance about recording equipment and the best way to achieve the realisation of my script. This enabled me to work effectively in the post-production stage, when the voices had been recorded, so that I could seamlessly manipulate the voices and layer them with elements of sound design. I recorded with numerous voices, until I found the voices that brought the cultural nuance suited to my work, and approached people through my school network to assist in the realisation of my script, including; peers, teachers, mothers and alumnae.

Siobhan McHugh's PhD, *Oral History and the Radio Documentary/Feature Intersections and Synergies*, examines the genres of oral history and radio journalism. Such insights allowed me to appreciate the importance of the balance between the amplified voice and other sonic elements, and to ensure that the primacy of the human voice is not overwhelmed by elements of sound. Upon reflection and experimentation, I decided that metaphoric and symbolic sounds (drones, music) as opposed to literal sounds (machine guns, footsteps), would more effectively enable me to signify moments of dramatic tension and heightened emotion effectively and with subtlety.

In contemporary radio drama, the intended audience includes listeners who have an interest in artistic and cultural radio programs. I would hope that my work will find an audience in this space and, because of its short form, might also be played in the context of events that explore the subject matter of women in war.

The experience of this process has enabled me to immerse myself in a new area of skill and has profoundly benefitted many aspects of my writing and has been a truly rewarding process. I hope that the audience for my work find it an enriching experience, as I did in composing and realising my Major Work.

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