

REFLECTION STATEMENT

The Great Glass Elevator

Performance Poetry

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Centre Number: 363



One is not born a woman, one becomes one

- Simone de Beauvoir

Reflection Statement

What would Prince Charming have for occupation if he had not to awaken the Sleeping beauty?

– Simone de Beauvoir

My performance poetry “The Great Glass Elevator” is a commentary which explores the myth of gender equality specifically the socialisation of women from birth to death through archetypal social narratives. Conceptually my work derives from an investigation of the tropes and gendered language of fairy-tales and the ways in which these shape both a woman’s self-image and societal roles and expectations. Specifically, I focus on the iconography of glass, a motif which appears in many fairy-tales. I have related this to the glass motif in the modern fairy-tale which tells women that success is possible for them and merely involves the shattering of the glass ceiling. The glass elevator of my poem travels through the stages of a woman’s life towards a glass ceiling moving metaphorically through each fairy-tale floor of the department store of life.

My performance combines modern elements such as the intertextuality of the current KIA advertisement with the tropes of the traditional fairy-tales. The intention of my work is to raise awareness in the audience of the powerful influence of societal narratives such as fairy-tales in the socialisation and shaping of identity leading to a sense of disempowerment of women. My use of allusions to fairy-tales and the retelling of *Hansel and Gretel* together with the use of children’s clapping games underscores this theme.

My concept arose from my Extension one elective study *Romanticism* where I began to reflect on challenges to the dominant societal paradigms posed by the tenets of individualism and idealism. Specifically, one of my additional texts Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* influenced the central feminist concerns of my piece. The philosophy underlying this treatise informs much of my poem. My protagonist is faced with challenges to her identity as she strives to achieve impossible societal and cultural ideals mythologised in the grand narrative of gender.

My performance poem stimulates and provokes thought as well as entertains through performance. Consequently it will appeal to a general demographic because of its humour and performance aspects. However, it will appeal to a more thoughtful and intellectual audience who would appreciate the commentary and aspects such as the piece's intertextuality. Specifically I envisage a mature mix-gendered audience of about eighteen to thirty-five year olds who have a particular interest in gender politics and frequent venues such as *The Friend in Hand Pub* in Glebe where renowned performance poets such as Omar Musa and Tug Dumbly perform. Community radio stations such as 2SER or FBi would also be ideal mediums for allowing greater accessibility through podcasting as their stations frequently critique and subvert the established values through performance poetry programs. Similarly, an online podcast such as Radio National's *Poetica* would be a suitable forum as it targets a wider and more discerning audience who will appreciate the intellectual content.

Three key texts which I researched independently have shaped both the form and content of my work: the performance poem *Pretty* by Kate Makkai, the play *Bombshells* by Joanna Murray-Smith, and a thesis *Examining Gender Difference in Hitting the Glass Ceiling & Riding the Glass Elevator* by Samantha A. Morris. These feminist critiques shaped my perception of the archetypal stereotypes perpetrated through socialisation of gender politics. Kate Makkai's poem *Pretty* shaped the Childhood Floor *Children's Wear & Other Fairy-*

tales of Princesses and informed the satirical and scathing tone of my piece evident in lines such as “Padded chests at two/The taming of the shrew”.

Bombshells proved a great inspiration in shaping the content, structure and poetic elements through its exploration of significant points in a women’s life and the varying challenges she is confronted with along the way. It was influential in my decision to structure my piece in stages; much the same way as Murray-Smith who segments her play based on varying stages of a woman’s life. This also resonated with my original idea to use the structuring device of Jacques’s monologue *All the World’s A Stage* from *As You Like It* to represent the seven stages of a women’s life. *Bombshells* also influenced my decision to use stream of consciousness which is particularly evident in Murray-Smith’s opening monologue *Meryl Louise Davenport* which ‘begins very slowly and then builds in pace until she is on a frenetic stream of consciousness sprint’. This parallels the *Fifth Floor: Maternity wear, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which adopts the same technique and is delivered in a fast paced and petulant manner. My onomatopoeic opening stream of consciousness is also shaped by Murray-Smith’s work as is her use of cabaret in her final monologue which was also influential in my decision to sing in parts. Through the use of imagery and linguistic techniques, each stage of life equates to a level in a department store lift as it ascends to its shattering crescendo: reaching the infamous and literal as well as metaphorical glass ceiling. The thesis by Samantha A Morris critically examines the discrimination suffered by women in the workforce and the obstacles they must overcome which informed the sixth floor *Corporate Wear, Glass Coffin – Cracks*. This is underscored by the meta-imagery of glass with allusions to the glass coffin from A.S Byatt’s *Possession*.

Initially, I had a limited understanding of form, techniques and performance styles of this genre. However, after viewing a performance at the HSC *Big Day Out* and online podcasts, I was enticed by the form’s ability to didactically convey meaning in a highly metaphoric yet

enjoyable manner. With my interest piqued I began to attend live performances such as slams. This became my primary method of research for the performance elements. As I immersed myself in live poetry readings, slams and performances, I acquired an awareness of the acute subtleties as well as significant tropes of the form that are essential in developing an engaging piece. I sought guidance, clarity and inspiration from renowned performance poet Omar Musa who performs with such rhapsody through the use of his animated voice yet underscores his work with sinister overtones. This ensures audience engagement as it provokes a response and is entertaining. For this reason, I chose to incorporate this technique as seen in the juxtaposition of the sinister content of the second floor with the innocent delivery of the poem.

I learnt from performance poets including Jefferson Bethke and Nancy Louka that this form is most effective when one varies pitch, pace, intention and pause. As performance poets engage their audience when they 'perform' their work, voice is the quintessence of this form. I sought to effectively vary the emotional intensity of my work, without compromising articulation or diction. This has the effect of giving the piece a high modality, thus forging a rapport with my audience and is reflected in my Major Work as the varying floors of my piece adopt a different tone based on the stage of life it symbolises. For example the Seventh and final floor adopts a sinister tone, therefore it is delivered in a defeated and weary manner in which the pace is slowed and there is a lack of intonation used. This is contrasted to the Second floor; representing childhood in which I perform a fast-paced children's rhyme. This juxtaposition of tone and pace adds colour, life and movement to my performance. In addition the use of pacing works in tandem with the use of pause to create momentum and allow the responder to reflect.

Additionally the metaphorical and performance aspects were influenced by the work of performance poet Shane Koyczan. Through my investigative research, I familiarised myself

with both the linguistic devices and poetic techniques this form allows. I sought to achieve the highly metaphoric tone that characterises his work. The success of his emblematic writing arises from his use of language techniques including irony, satire, repetition and juxtaposition. I combined such techniques with other linguistic devices including intertextuality and word association such as allusions to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* which is evident in the line 'It's a truth/(a platitude, an attitude screaming beatitude)/ universally acknowledged'. In doing so, my work is highly metaphoric and challenges the listener to think and reflect on the over-arching didactic message.

In addition to the linguistic elements, the combination of poetic techniques and use of voice differentiates this form from poetry. I choose to incorporate such auditory devices including assonance, alliteration, enjambment and rhyme to elicit an emotional response from the listener. This is highlighted in a stream of consciousness in which the words 'siliconised, sexualised, trivialised' linger, holding sinister connotation and resonates with my thematic concern.

The composition of my Major Work has been rewarding and insightful. Despite the difficulties I have encountered such as my initial indecisiveness, it has been an enriching experience. I am content that I have achieved my original goal: to compose a highly metaphorical, didactic and entertaining piece of performance poetry. I have thoroughly enjoyed myself as I immersed myself in this poetic experience.