

Reflection Statement

The principal purpose of my three-part Major Work, ‘Creation’, ‘Earth’ and ‘Legacy’, is to construct a multidimensional character of Pandora, typically silenced in Greek mythology and Western adaptations. The concept of my major work initially stemmed from my interest in Greek mythology. Whilst I have always been fascinated by Greek mythology, I have never been able to authentically relate to its characters, as the heroes are traditionally male. The myth of Pandora fascinated me, as it is the complicated tale of ‘the archetypal woman’¹ and her role as a necessary evil in ancient Greece. Thus, my choice to explore an often-neglected voice has inspired me to challenge the myth of Pandora, giving voice to the women who have typically been silenced within ancient Greece. I hope to encourage my audience to challenge the myth of Pandora that reflects the paternal structure of ancient Greek culture, as values and attitudes burgeoned from this portrayal serve as a justification of women’s inferiority to men. Essentially, my Major Work seeks to challenge and confront these enduring, albeit ancient, attitudes through performance poetry.

In my Major Work, I have explored the way identity is shaped by a patriarchal society that both silences and alienates the female voice. My interest in the possible depth of Pandora’s character fuelled my performance poetry, which dictated my writing experience as my language choices, such as the use of enjambment, were influenced by my choice of form. Performance poetry also allowed me to explore and adapt the Greek myth effectively and respectfully. Moreover, performance poets such as Sarah

¹ Pandora’s Senses: The Feminine Character of the Ancient Text, Vered Lev Kanaan.

N/A, 2008

Kay, Denice Frohman and Neil Hilborn determined my choice of blank verse, as its rhetorical purpose enabled my performance to be more expressive.

My intention to unravel and challenge the ancient Greek portrayal of Pandora through performance poetry is informed by my research into the depiction of women in Greek mythology and examination of ancient Greek poetry as a form of gendered speech, as I explored how men and women's performances illustrate ancient Greek gender ideologies². The Greek tradition of female performers who disavowed the power of their speech, whilst men associated themselves with triumph over a defeated mythological female figure is particularly important in the development of my concept. I found that Greek mythology has infiltrated the English language, as well as the history of literature, thus demonstrating the continuing impact of a limited portrayal of Pandora. My revised portrayal of Pandora is shaped by my research into Greek mythology and its portrayal of gender, this is demonstrated in the lines, "*And though the phrase felt strange in her mouth/She learnt how to ask for more*". It is evident that there is an asserted disconnection from women in ancient Greece³ as a result of a dominant male voice and the silencing of women, which has resulted in a limited portrayal of Pandora, thus informing the current depiction of women that my Major Work seeks to correct.

² Ibid.

³ Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece, Eva Stehle. Princeton University Press, 1997

An investigation into the reception of fictocritical performance poetry⁴, a postmodern form that I used to reimagine a Classic archetype, saw me appreciate the pivotal role played by the audience. Significantly, incorporating poetic devices such as repetition to engage and guide the audience influenced the creation of my major work, demonstrated through the repeated line, “*before Pandora, there was...*” I have directed the themes and attitudes of my major work towards a literate audience, cognisant of quotidian dictation and phrases, who are also interested in Greek mythology. Moreover, as I briefly reference several Greek mythological figures, and significant women in history, my work is directed to an educated audience who are familiar with the myths and historical figures as they assume a degree of foreknowledge required by the listener. Further to this, I intend to enter my poems into the Australian Poetry Slam; as I hope my performance poem could conceivably add to the existing, although limited, body of work already established in relation to performance poetry in Australia.

The structure of my form is critical to effectively portraying my concept of silenced women in history, and my decision to perform three separate poems has a significant impact on the audience’s experience of my Major Work. The three poems each focus on the nature of time as an individual stage in Pandora’s story; Creation, Earth, and Legacy. My focus on the audience’s relationship with the Major Work is conducive to my decision to have three poems, as I feel the concept, redefining Pandora in a modern context, will be more accessible and tangible than a single poem. The relationship between the three poems is strong, as their relationship is symbiotic. My

⁴ Discovering the self: Fictocriticism, flux and authorial identity. Elizabeth Pattinson, University of Sydney 2013

intention for the performance of the three poems is that they are read as part of a series that creates a dynamic experience of Pandora for the audience, this is possible due to the presence of a developed, and continuous, story arc. Further to this, my decision to incorporate music was profoundly significant as it aided in punctuating holophrastic language whilst simultaneously highlighting the tone and concept of the performance poems. The structure of my Major Work is significant as it allows me to further develop my ideas and explore themes of hope and the nature of heroic deeds whilst still capturing the audience's attention.

My Major Work required further study into women in literature to achieve a piece that spoke accurately to the humanity of Pandora's character. The study of Jane Austen and Fay Weldon in Advanced English focused my thinking on female writers who offer agency to women through a reassessment of social boundaries. The comparative study of Austen and Weldon is particularly significant in determining the direction of my Major Work through its encouragement of writers to advocate for social change in contemporary society. The power of writing to shift societal values and attitudes, thus forcing readers to reassess their understanding of the complexity of social expectations, plays a fundamental role in determining the purpose of my Major Work. Further to this, the poetry of T.S Eliot and Denise Levertov in Advanced and Extension 1 English are instrumental in shaping the concept of my poetry. I found Eliot's subtle literary, historical and biblical allusions in Journey of the Magi and The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock particularly interesting as a literary technique to make a poem multi-dimensional – this then shapes my own writing as I include allusions to strong women throughout history in my poetry. This is evident in the lines, *“lines of code nestled in moon craters/a seat that stands/a heart and stomach of*

a king” which references Margaret Hamilton, Rosa Parks and Queen Elizabeth I respectively. This is also evident in the line, “*a quickened succession of busy nothings*” which is borrowed from Jane Austen’s Mansfield Furthermore, Eliot’s poetic form was influential as sound was extremely important in his modernist poetry, and the oratory feature in his poems aided the development of my Major Work. Moreover, Levertov’s dissenting voice greatly directed the purpose of my performance poetry, as I was inspired by her desire to offer a voice to silenced groups.

Research into other creative works⁵ that discussed a similar concept to what I intended to achieve greatly enhanced my understanding of the topic, and therefore propelled the development of my Major Work. The World’s Wife by Carol Anne Duffy⁶ reconstructs famous stories and presents a female perspective where the male character has typically been dominant; this idea greatly shapes the concept of dissenting women that is exhibited in my performance poetry. ‘Little Red Cap’, a ‘*combination of feminist theory and fairy tale*’⁷, suggests that there is violence involved in asserting independent identity; greatly influenced my work, as I depicted Pandora’s search for an individual identity in a patriarchal society. Cassandra by Christa Wolf made me consider the way Pandora could be conveyed, as I was interested in its exploration into the role and power of language through the protagonist. The use of character for authorial commentary in Wolf’s novel was substantially important as it shapes the structure of my own piece, in which I incorporate the voice of Pandora to comment on silenced voices of women in our

⁵ The Penelopiad by Margaret Atwood, Marianna by Alfred Lord Tennyson

⁶ Published in 1999

⁷ Carol Anne Duffy: The World’s Wife, Barry Wood. Sheer Poetry, 2005.

society. This is evident in the lines, *“Because he could only provide what he thought she wanted/And history has shown that men should not make decisions on behalf of a woman and her body”*. The story of Cassandra is of critical importance in the construction of my concept as Wolf highlighted an impulse to dismiss women, which forms the basis of my Major Work. The decision to focus my Major Work on a dissenting female character was greatly influenced by these works as I drew inspiration from characterisation, structure and voice.

Through performance poetry, I was able to effectively develop my concept as it allows a detailed characterisation of Pandora to be formed. The portrayal of Pandora culminates in the limited role of women in contemporary society and was thus a concept that shapes the voice, audience and form of my Major Work. Moreover, Pandora has come to represent the strength and confidence of womanhood that has the capacity to inspire contemporary young women. It was a challenging process that required reflection on conveying purpose, particularly through voice, but my Major Work has proved to be a deeply rewarding experience. My Major Work has been instrumental in the development of my understanding of women in literature, which in turn has reaffirmed the power of writers in challenging the values and attitudes of a society. My performance poetry has detailed the similarities between Pandora’s overtly oppressive patriarchal society and the subtler silencing and oppressing of women that occurs within our own.