

## Reflective Note on “Contemplations Through a Mirror”

by

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“Contemplations Through a Mirror” was created as a collage of fragments taken from three 20th -century Australian novels: Jean Devanny’s *Sugar Heaven*, Eve Langley’s *The Pea Pickers*, and Christina Stead’s *For Love Alone*. While the three novels deal with different themes, there is a common core in all of them; the female characters of the texts are dissatisfied with the restrictions imposed on them by their social status and find themselves in search for an escape through which they gain a sense of vitality. For *Sugar Heaven*’s Dulcie, it is the 1936 cane cutters’ strike for better working conditions, echoing Devanny’s own active involvement in politics, that becomes a force of expression for her creativity and desires. Eve Langley’s novel presents the semi-autobiographical journey of two androgynous figures; Steve and Blue are two young women who dress as men to work as agricultural laborers. In doing so, Langley’s characters become Australian wanderers, engaging in a topographical and metaphysical search for identity which is traditionally a masculine quest. Finally, Christina Stead’s Teresa becomes a female Ulysses as she embarks on a search for love in her own terms. Nicole Moore links Australian women’s dynamic presence in the literary genre of the novel during the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the novel serving as a space of artistic freedom, allowing women “to develop their own tradition” (26), away from patriarchal scrutiny. It is this idea of writing as an escape from traditional restrictions of womanhood and as a room for the expression and exploration of the multiple dimensions of femininity that inspired my collage.

When I started composing it, the first step was to select specific passages from the excerpts, a process which was intuitive, as I did not have a specific image in mind regarding the way the

pieces would be connected. I was mostly drawn to excerpts that displayed a certain lyricism and seemed to encompass a common emotional core which informed the style of the passages. After assembling the excerpts, I felt that they composed a polyphonic exploration of womanhood in the 20th century, its spiritual and sensual dimensions as well as the oppression thereof. I found it really inspiring that these women dared to shed some light on those aspects of female experience that were hidden in the shadows of what Nicholas Birns describes as a “literary mainstream” that was rather “misogynistic” (29), and this in turn moved me to compose certain lines as a meditation of these ideas discussed in the novels, which I felt were particularly significant for me. The more I worked on the collage the more the material shifted, and the lines and ideas blended with each other which resulted in something like an amalgam of hues from each text. In the final product, the lines taken from the novels are signaled with double quotation marks and a different font for each text.

Being heavily inspired by Christina Stead’s text, I framed my collage as a ritual of self-exploration and meditation taking place in the secrecy of a room. Echoing Virginia Woolf, it is of primary importance that the female writer has “a room of her own” (51), in order to break the silence surrounding her thoughts and feelings. In my collage, the room expands through a mirror as a safe space enclosing the speaker, allowing her to freely contemplate her experiences. The mirror is another element inspired by Virginia Woolf. Quoting *A Room of One’s Own*: “Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (35). In the collage, the “looking-glass vision” (Woolf 36), is appropriated and reserved for the woman, serving as a window through which a dialogue is taking place between an ‘I’ and a ‘Her’. As the speakers connect through shared past and present experiences, the lines become blurry. Each one is encompassed in each other’s reflection and the blending of their voices hopefully conveys the way in which the texts are placed in a discussion.

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For the visual component of the collage, I used various forms of artworks by different artists. The overall atmosphere of the piece was inspired by the art of David Lynch, who is one of my favorite artists, and whose art presents a dreamy and abstract quality which I felt suited the collage. I combined these pieces with other artworks that had a similar aura, including works by designer Dianne Hunt and artist James Zucco, as well as with some of Canva's graphic elements, and eventually came up with the idea of drawing a fine line across the slides, as a thread that stitches the whole piece together. The line represents the thought process behind the creative piece and the ways in which the different perspectives and fragments come together to a liberating whole.

## Works Cited

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