

DRAMA

Contemporary Australian theatre is unique in its experiential form, touching on a plethora of styles to invent a new form of theatre that aims to express modern experiences and issues in Australian society. In *Still Angela*, for example, Kemp engages with elements of Expressionism and Surrealism but employs techniques such as stylized movement, dance, and symbolism to express a new, fractured form. This non-linear style influences the way in which audiences interpret and respond to the images and ideas presented to them. Through its rhythmic structure, Kemp explores the contemporary feminine psyche by presenting a mix of memories, dreams, imagination, and reflection to present an image of the 21st Australian women (as represented by Angela) to reflect the play's wider concern with gender roles in relationships and societal expectations, and a personal journey for identity. As such, the play conveys Angela's personal struggles in regards to her unfulfilled relationship with Jack, her fears regarding fertility, and aging. When devising my monologue, I tried to consider the significance of Kemp's convention of multiple characterisation and its comment upon the influence of past, present, and potential for the future and thus constructed the piece in a three stage structure to translate it into monologue-style. By utilizing techniques such as dance, stream of consciousness, lighting, and symbolism (through costuming, prop use, and images), I aimed to encourage the audience to consider the struggles of Angela as the image of the modern woman while reflecting contemporary Australian theatre's exploration of both form and personal issues.

The multifaceted role of women in Australia is one of conflict between the contemporary and traditional. By the juxtaposition of images of fertility, Angela's preoccupation with babies and children, the ever-present domestic sphere, and sensual femininity, I aimed to influence the audience's notion of what constitutes as 'female' and the difficulty for Angela in fulfilling all of these expectations. Through the use of symbolic costume, choosing to wear a simple orange slip, I aimed to parallel to the poetic language of "the orange blossom" which is "so ripe" to evoke an image of fertility. This image is reinforced by the ambiguity surrounding Angela's comment "she's disappeared", the audience not knowing whether this is in reference to her mother or a lost baby. This equivocal "monster of love" hauntingly "walks around [her] head", and her desire to escape suggested by her need to "get a gun or knife and kill you off". Additionally, her dream of a baby that wasn't hers "to look after but someone else's" and her comment to Jack "I'm not your mother" reflects her subconscious struggle with traditional notions of motherhood and fertility. By presenting these subtle parallels, I aimed to encourage audience consideration of Angela's complex concerns regarding her fertility and the societal expectations of childbearing.

Angela's experiences in her relationship with Jack are vividly portrayed in the dominating, box-like double bed (constructed by blocks, reflecting the grid motif), which acts as a symbol of their unfulfilling and often passionless relationship. Angela's frustrated appeals, "Are you listening, at all?" and "you're unconscious" reflect her later reflection that Jack doesn't "have any sound, any presence". The conversational dialogue indicated by pauses and reactive characterisation relies on the audience's imagination and further emphasises Jack's emotional absence. Through this juxtaposition of the domestic space (alluded to by Angela's making of the bed), her emotional appeals to Jack: "I'm lonely" and his inability to understand: "Do I want to have sex?" (echoed again with the notably empty bed), the monologue reflects the difficulty of men in understanding female dilemmas. Angela's later Cha-cha dancing with a broom reiterates the awkward contrast between the female domestic and sensual role, and the dual symbol of the Cha-cha acts as a paradox: conveying both a freedom and desire, as well as a controlled and structured routine absent of any male partner. Through Jack's absence indicated by reactive characterisation, the symbol of the cha-cha, and the grid-like bed, the audience could consider the implications of gender expectations upon her relationship and the struggles of Angela to fulfill these while still maintaining a sense of identity and personal fulfillment.

The three-stage structure of the monologue presents Angela's journey for identity in a dream-like style verging on the surreal, presenting Angela's at three periods of transition: the youthful energy of a naïve Angela in her struggles with Jack, the trance like "travelling" of a transient Angela, and the reflective Angela at the cusp of "a crucial age for a woman" (middle age). I aimed to emphasise Angela's journey through non-verbal language at each stage, with the younger Angela characterised by her reactive and vibrant characterisation. By "travelling" along a metaphorical pathway indicative of her journey, I aimed to present the irony that although Angela is moving "through a particular passage" she is restricted. Through my expressionistic movement through the space, along the "path" (more reminiscent of a tightrope), I aimed to convey Angela's personal struggle to move forward from her past and her difficulty in pursuing her individual desires for the future and sense of self while balancing a prescribed and fixed identity: her gender role.

As she arrives "at the end of the path", Angela is able to both look forward, "on the hunt for the grit inside her shell", and reflect in retrospect (indicated by her "stillness"), reiterated by the rhythmic stream of consciousness dialogue (spoken alongside the patterned cha-cha dancing) which present a plethora of fleeting images to the audience: "lino on all the floors, a kitchen...birthday girl...an adult life, a crucial age for a woman, who has not yet fully embarked". The use of third person in the 'Angela and the Bat' section show the irony that while Angela is "travelling" she is "blind", and that although she is able to contemplate with clarity, she is still distanced from a sense of self. As such, my monologue aims to convey the complexity for the "aging" woman "on the hunt" for her identity, showing that although she is "travelling along a particular passage" the Australian woman is still burdened. Finally, the cyclical structure of the monologue, indicated by ending the monologue in the same space as the opening (at the foot of the bed) and her dialogue: "I'm no Angel, Jack", emphasises Kemp's idea of the metatemporal influence of past/present/future on the current self. This choice, reiterated through the box-like spotlight, aims to encourage the audience to note the complexity of Angela's personal experiences as an Australian woman and their ongoing impact upon her.

Through presenting an overtly visual piece which emphasised symbols and fleeting images of gender issues, using a fractured plotline unconcerned with distractive narrative lines, I could stage Angela's individual experiences with Jack, her concerns regarding fertility, and journey for identity. The complexity of Angela's struggles reflects the need for Australian theatre to use a multitude of styles to construct a new form if it is to successfully stage the diverse issues found in contemporary Australian culture regarding prescribed identity, gender roles and the societal expectations associated with these. By using techniques such as poetic dialogue, I could emphasise the symbolic images of the "orange blossom" and fertility reiterated by costuming. Through this integration of image and concept, technique and convention, I could stage Angela's diverse experiences as embodiment of the journey of the contemporary Australian woman, reflecting Australian drama's experiential form and influencing the audience in considering the complexity of modern day life.