

Griffith University

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The art lovers

Abstract:

The feature film script *The Art Lovers* is the story of the struggles and the triumphs for an early Australian female artist, the ‘girl sculptress’, as Daphne Mayo was known in the early twentieth century, at a time when very few women took on this physically demanding occupation. This excerpt is from that feature screenplay and highlights the challenges she faced especially as an Australian within a rigid British culture when she was the only woman studying sculpture at the Royal Academy in London. Daphne Mayo is engaged in these scenes in a daily prosaic acculturated event, that of a morning breakfast in a patriarchal London establishment in 1923. The excerpt is inspired by a story that Daphne herself penned as prose and which was discovered during research conducted over months in the Fryer Collection of the University of Queensland. The Fryer holds almost 100 boxes of ephemera, newspaper stories as well as correspondence to, and from, Daphne Mayo. The nuance of the voices of all three of the lead characters included in this dramatic recreation, that is to say, those of Lloyd Rees, Vida Lahey and Daphne, were discovered by listening to the 1960s interviews conducted by ABC journalist Hazel de Berg. These interviews are lodged in the Oral History Section of the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

Biographical note:

Dr. Debra Beattie is a Senior Lecturer at Griffith Film School. She studied film at Swinburne in Melbourne, and then worked as a broadcast and broadband documentarian until entering higher education with a doctorate on the theory and practice of producing documentary online. Over the past decade, she has also produced museum installation work including the Fairweather Room in the Seaside Museum, Bribie Island. She is currently working on delivering multi-platform versions of the Daphne Mayo story, for broadcast and broadband using new communication technologies such as Cinema 4D. Her research outcomes for The Daphne Mayo Project will include an exhibition at the Museum of Brisbane in 2019. Her role in these outcomes is as the originator of the script/treatment.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Scriptwriting as research – Linear narrative – Docudrama – Mayo, Daphne

THE ART LOVERS

INT. LONDON DINING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

The scene is of a London dining room in 1923. The walls have a dark wood panelling inlaid with art deco designs. DAPHNE MAYO is waiting to be seated. She is wearing a chiffon dress embroidered with rosettes but carrying a large coat as the weather this Spring is particularly cool.

The waitress greets Daphne at the door of the dining room, escorts her to a table and gives her the menu.

The people in the room are mostly tables of men, many about to head out for their day of business at the nearby stock exchange.

LLOYD REES is Daphne's fiancé and he arrives at the door shaking the raindrops of his cap and smiles broadly as he sees her.

DAPHNE

Lloyd! You look like a drowned rat!

LLOYD

(laughing)

Glad we are planning a day indoors at the Gallery.

DAPHNE

Hmm, it is not a very large menu I'm afraid. We can have either eggs and/or cold ham.

LLOYD

Eggs and ham for me!

DAPHNE

I will make do with the eggs, cheers.

LLOYD orders their food.

DAPHNE, as is her habit, has a book with her. This one is *The Wise Virgins* by Leonard Woolf, published in London in 1914.

DAPHNE

Lloyd, this Leonard Woolf is just so interesting a writer! And writes so eloquently of London and his courtship of Virginia!

(reading aloud)

And this applies to 999 out of every thousand noble and inarticulate human beings for whom bed and night so often bring the horrors of self-revelation...

The waitress interrupts her reading as she arrives with their breakfast which they both eat heartily.

DAPHNE

How do you think those male students at the Academy will respond now that I have been declared the winner of the Gold Medal for Sculpture?

LLOYD

Well, as there has been a protest from nearly every single one of 'em over the years arguing that - you - as a woman - had no right to be there in the first place...

DAPHNE looks at him, momentarily taken aback.

LLOYD

(As he moves in for a kiss ...)

Little did they realise, Dappho, that you have... the tenacity of a Tamborine Mountain tick.

DAPHNE joins him in saying the last line 'tenacity of a Tamborine Mountain tick' as it is clearly a phrase that is often used to describe her.

They share the moment with tender affection.

CROSS FADE

Daphne has finished her breakfast by now.

DAPHNE

I still feel hungry.

Lloyd is still tucking into his two eggs, and ham.

Daphne glances at his plate, and then around at other plates on other tables, and sees two eggshells on each plate. Daphne looks downcast.

LLOYD

Pick yourself up off the floor,
girl! You aren't going to let them
get away with that, are you,
Daphne? This is London and it is
1923. Stand up for yourself!

DAPHNE frowns even harder, and eventually calls the waitress to the table.

DAPHNE

May I have another egg please?

MAID

But you have had your egg!

DAPHNE

I am hungry - and - and I can see
two eggshells on all those plates!

There is a long pause as the maid looks around and frowns back at her.

MAID

But those were men!

LLOYD buries himself in his newspaper.

DAPHNE sits ramrod straight in her chair.

DAPHNE

Do they pay more than me?

MAID

No.

LONG PAUSE as all three exchange looks.

DAPHNE

In that case, I would like another
egg, please.

MAID

But a *lady* never has two eggs.

DAPHNE

(takes deep breath)
Will you go and order one for me,
please?

The waitress departs looking very hostile.

LLOYD

Ah well we will be in Rome soon,
and then Florence to see the
sights.

DAPHNE manages a slight smile.

DAPHNE

Yes indeed, that travelling
scholarship to Italy is the best
part of the Gold Medal Award.

The waitress returns some minutes later.

MAID

(haughty)

The cook has already gone off duty.

DAPHNE

(frowning)

Off duty?

LLOYD

(sighing)

Oh well not much to be done then.

He rises to head to the cashier to pay the bill.

DAPHNE

Hrumph!

As DAPHNE is leaving the dining room to follow Lloyd out on to the street, she is accosted by a manager even more hostile than the waitress.

MANAGER

Excuse me, Madam, but I hear that
you asked for a second egg for
breakfast.

DAPHNE nods, quizzical at the reason for the question.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

In England, a lady does not have a
second egg.

DAPHNE

(offended)

Well, I understand that a lady pays the same tariff as a man. Therefore she is entitled to the same food - if that is what she wants.

The MANAGER becomes even haughtier, repeating his previous line with much more emphasis:

MANAGER

But a LADY does not have two eggs in England.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUNGE ROOM - EVENING

There is a small Art Deco lamp on the table between them and some of Daphne's plaster models for *The Prodigal Son* behind them. DAPHNE and VIDA are sharing a glass of dry sherry.

DAPHNE

Later I met the proprietor and her face didn't try to conceal her opinion of 'these Australians'. She told me that she had heard of my request for a second egg, and that a LADY etc. etc. etc. I seemed to be a marked person after that. Everybody had been told of my outrageous behaviour apparently, and I am sure, shuddered slightly as I passed.

VIDA laughs in admiration.

VIDA

How awful for you!

DAPHNE

Yes indeed, and then! About ten days later, at dinner one evening, the maid rushed in, quite breathless she was, and announced to all the room, mind you, "Oh Miss Mayo, you CAN have two eggs for breakfast".

VIDA is clearly becoming infatuated with this feisty woman.

DAPHNE

I concluded that a board meeting
had been called to consider this
unprecedented case.

VIDA

I do wish I could have been present
at that meeting! Oh to have heard
all those weighty arguments ... for -
and of course, against - YOUR extra
egg!

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

Research statement

Research background

This work is underpinned by discourse in the field of ‘speculative biography’, a field that has most recently been elaborated on by Donna Lee Brien in the *TEXT* Special Issue (28), *Fictional Histories and Historical Fictions* (2015). It also draws on archival research conducted over months in the Fryer Collection of the University of Queensland, which included over 100 boxes of ephemera and correspondence of the subject, Daphne Mayo. Based on a story that Daphne herself penned as prose, this excerpt makes use of 1960s interviews by ABC journalist Hazel de Berg, which can be found in the Oral History Section of the National Library of Australia.

Research contribution

A work in progress, *The Art Lovers* focuses on the struggle for a female, and Australian, identity within a rigid British culture. Drawing on the field of speculative biography, then, this screenplay highlights the personal struggle of the once highly acclaimed ‘girl sculptress’, as Daphne Mayo was known, in the early part of the twentieth century. It uses speculation on research already curated by university archive in order to depict a woman engaged in the daily prosaic acculturated event of a morning breakfast – in a patriarchal London establishment in 1923. This work is a deliberate attempt to write a dramatized biography within an accurate socio-historical context that adhered to the bio-pic genre.

Research significance

Daphne Mayo was a significant and once major figure of the Australian art scene. Her story has been largely forgotten, and this retelling contains so much of what were the key factors in early Australia, including the rise of the ‘new woman’. A wholly original work, this screenplay excerpt has been double-blind peer-reviewed for *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, a peak journal in the creative writing discipline.