



A note from the author of

Instrument

Googling ‘famous scientists’ returns a list of familiar names – they’re embedded in our textbooks and immortalised as units and theorems. I wasn’t surprised by the lack of ‘female scientists’ in this list. After all, ‘Women in STEM’ has become the latest buzzword and part of the push for diversity involves acknowledging their historic absence.

Historic absence ... or so I thought! Further googling revealed a *massive* archive of heroes hidden in the crevices of history. They lived interesting and extraordinary lives. Émilie du Châtelet – quick-witted and reckless – accelerated our understanding of physics. Ada Lovelace understood the Analytical Engine’s potential at a level fundamentally different from everyone else at the time; mathematically trained and wildly imaginative, she wrote the first computer program. Hedy Lamarr was a Hollywood actress by day and the pioneer of the basis for wi-fi by night. I wanted to tell their stories; but how could a writer ever represent the complexity of someone else’s lived experience?

This sparked the genesis of *Instrument*, an experimental piece of performance poetry. Hutcheon’s postmodern concept of ‘historiographic metafiction’ offered a theoretical base – positing history as a narrativisation of the past and literature as a way to challenge it. I connected representation in STEM with representation in the literary sense. Analysing performance poems became a pastime, and disparate ideas seemed to meld into place on Sydney’s trains.

What I didn’t anticipate in this process was how entangled it would become with my own sense of identity. I’ve always taken pride in my wide range of interests – from computer science and maths to literature, language and social justice more broadly. Yet, these fields had always seemed incompatible in the long run.

Instrument became the product of an experiment, a cumulation of ‘what ifs’. What if I wrote a rap from the perspective of an Enlightenment-era mathematician? Built a poem on wordplay? Or studied computer science with the humanities!?

Answering one question only spurred a greater number of deeper questions. If there's one thing I've taken away from English Extension 2, it's that you can never truly be finished.

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