

**TSSM**<sup>TM</sup>  
Creating VCE Success

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES  
PAIRED COMPARISONS

**Bombshells / The  
Penelopiad: The Myth of  
Penelope and Odysseus**

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SAMPLE

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TEXT 1

**Bombshells**

## AUTHOR NOTES

Murray-Smith was born in Mount Eliza, Victoria. Her father was the literary editor and academic Stephen Murray-Smith. She attended Toorak College, graduating with BA (Hons) from the University of Melbourne. She later attended a writing program at Columbia University.

Her plays have been translated and performed widely around the world. According to the Australia Council, Murray-Smith and Daniel Keene account for half of all foreign productions of Australian plays.

Her play *Honour* has been produced in more than three dozen countries, including productions on Broadway and the Royal National Theatre in London. Her novels include *Rapture*, *Nightfall*, *Redemption*, *Love Child*, *Atlanta* and *Flame*.

*Bombshells*, according to the author, was originally conceived by Simon Phillips, then artistic director of the Melbourne Theatre Company. It was written for a single actor, Caroline O'Connor. It was first presented at the Fairfax Theatre in Melbourne on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2001. It was performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2004, and four of the monologues were televised by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 2003.

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## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The stated intent of *Bombshells* is to present 'women on the edge' where their public and private lives intersect. In the post-feminist era, comments Murray-Smith, women have "forsaken one kind of madness with other kinds." The play is understood to offer insight into the post-feminist era. Murray-Smith has been quoted saying that she resents "the dishonesty" of pretending that the kids of working mothers are not "guinea pigs in an experiment that is, in many ways, a failure". Critics have commented that to make the thesis that everyone is confused by the outcomes of feminism Murray-Smith's characters have to elect themselves as stereotypes and there cannot be too much dialogue between competing viewpoints.

Murray Smith argues in the preface that where women formerly drove themselves mad trying to suppress their ambitions or dreams, now they drive themselves mad by "trying to fulfil

them all simultaneously, dissecting themselves under the microscope of self-analysis, disappearing in the impossible pressures of the will to be good, to be great and to be true to every single instinct.” In this sense, the play is a critique of twenty first century feminism.

## GENRE

*Bombshells* is a play consisting only of monologues. This means that the principle relationship is between the character and the audience rather than between characters. Monologues typically involve the character expressing their mental thoughts aloud, either to themselves, to the audience, or occasionally to another character off stage. They are common across the range of dramatic media and are also used in poetry. They are similar to other literary devices, such as soliloquies and apostrophes.

The play is classified as an interior monologue, which means there is little or no action and a heavy concentration on both the internal life of the character, and the interplay between that internal life and the language used. Often the sub-text – what is being implied rather than what is being said, is of greater importance than is the case in other genres.

This is true of *Bombshells*, where the characters’ sub-texts tend to be more important than what they say. For example, what Mary Louise Davenport says tends to be relatively prosaic, but the sub-text is a vivid depiction of a woman under extreme stress and struggling with the weight of expectation.

This in turn suggests that the play has an element of social commentary. The characters are not just depictions of people, they are taken as representative of specific social issues.