Top Class Theatre Studies

Matilda Komene monologue transcript

*Picnic at Hanging Rock by Tom Wright*, adapted from the book by Joan Lindsey.

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Monologue script from scenes 5 and 14, pp.39-41 and 72-74

I have been the headmistress  
Of Young Ladies’ colleges  
For many, many years  
I am going to speak frankly now:  
In the old country  
One becomes a lady  
Through a myriad  
Of invisible rites  
Through osmosis as it were  
The world  
It organises itself about one  
One cannot make that assumption here  
Becoming a lady  
Happens within  
As well as without  
Many is the Australian girl  
Who looks like us  
Who dresses like us  
But can never be us  
We speak the same language  
But the words  
Have different meanings here  
A goldfish taken from her pond  
Is still a goldfish  
Still a goldfish  
Flipping and gasping  
Under the sun.  
This school  
Crafts the young mind  
The young body  
From something  
Elemental  
Something raw  
Into something fine.  
This country  
In it’s childish state  
Its state of nature  
You may see

At first it needs taming  
Needs to be brought to heel  
But then  
It may be cultured  
May leave its childhood  
Behind  
Grow into something  
Cultivated  
A garden  
An Eden of sorts  
I appreciate that young minds   
Sometimes struggle  
This is a metaphor  
Only a metaphor  
Well, no  
It is not a metaphor  
For this *is* a garden-  
But a true garden, in a civilised place   
Has no spiders that lurk   
Or serpents of venom  
In any event  
I am speaking of what it is   
To resist  
In this country  
In this land  
One must resist  
Or one shall never see Eden  
To grow this paradise   
Needs restraint  
Reining in  
Vigilance against weeds  
Vigilance against disease  
How often have I emphasised this  
Cleanliness, yes  
Vigilance against coarseness  
Of word  
Of thought of habit  
Here   
At least here  
I thought we might  
Shore up a bulwark  
Erect a wall  
And grow within   
Delicate flowers   
Of the heart  
No matter what pestilential species   
promulgate their tendrils without  
What hybrid malformations screech their   
concupiscent  
Moanings in our attics  
What men of the night  
Lurk  
Waiting  
Vigilance.

Here is the gate that Miranda opened  
To let the picnic party in  
Here is the creek  
Snaring the last afternoon light  
In placid pools  
Vertical walls   
Of rock  
Already deep shade  
Undergrowth  
Exuding dank forest breath of decay  
After a life  
Of linoleum  
Asphalt  
Axminister  
Heavy flat-footed woman  
Finally feels the springing earth  
Sits on a fallen log  
Removes her gloves  
The blood it is bubbling under the surface  
Wishing to break out,  
Spread across the fields –   
She can see for miles  
Glinting rooves of Romsey  
Mount Macedon  
Farmsteads  
Wisps of smoke  
Haze of the city  
An eagle circling in heaven  
Perspiration trickles  
Under stiff lace on her throat  
It is as if no human being   
Has ever come here  
On this solid ghost of an explosion primeval  
For the first time  
It dawns on her  
What it means  
To climb this Rock  
As the lost girls  
Long, long ago  
In full-skirted frocks  
Had climbed  
Had climbed into-  
She brings them to mind  
Without compassion:  
The dead  
Both dead  
All dead  
The monstrous masses  
The dark flood  
The dead  
Of course  
This land is for the dead  
More theirs than ours  
Stones slide under her feet  
With every step  
Higher  
Harder  
Heart pounding  
Here a precipice  
A spider large black  
Sprawled on a stone  
Always afraid of spiders  
Recoils  
There  
Inside the rock  
Shes sees Sara  
One eye  
Staring  
A mask of rotting flesh  
The old woman’s hat falls off  
And she sprints  
To the edge  
To the vast darkness  
Sprints  
Into the abyss  
As we all should

[Interpretation Statement]

For my interpretation of Elizabeth Appleyard from Tom Wright's adaptation of *Picnic At Hanging Rock*, my dramaturgical research into the spiritual context surrounding Hanging Rock aided my creative acting and directing choices. The monologue comprises of two contrasting sections from Wright’s script. In the first section, I applied acting skills, specifically a stern facial expression, and distinct upper class English accent to showcase Appleyard’s role as Headmistress. As Director, to highlight Wright’s original theme of time, I utilised 12 sprigs of wattle deliberately placed to reflect points on a clock.

Appleyard distinctly shifts clockwise between each point beginning at nine o’clock, when the girls depart for Hanging Rock and finishing at six when they arrive back at the College. Furthermore, my directorial decision to have Appleyard contained within the wattle was an abstract representation of the world of the play and the theme of nature. A student Sara is also present in the first section.

As an Actor, I created an actor-audience relationship through the employment of Epic Theatre by breaking the fourth wall, directly addressing the audience about Sara’s behaviour while attending Appleyard College. In the second section, I imagined that Sara had left to leave Appleyard alone on stage. From my contextual research into the scene and setting, I chose to showcase the unravelling of Appleyard’s maddening thoughts impacted by the spiritual energy on Hanging Rock. I manipulated contrast and motion through my change in physical and vocal demeanour by frantically moving outside the circle. This also illustrated the disjointed, stylised structure of the scene. I employed the original theatre style, Australian Gothic Horror as well as German Expressionism to further portray Appleyard’s madness. My choice to smear my makeup and darkly stare directly at the audience employed focus and created a suspenseful atmosphere, demonstrating Appleyard’s shift in character. My dramaturgical research into the eerie, mysterious atmosphere of Hanging Rock was highlighted in my soundscape, further emphasising the character’s insanity.

My set design showcased the contrast between Appleyard’s feminine expectations in 1900 and the untamable Australian landscape. I utilised wattle as it is a native Australian species. The chairs embodiment of Hanging Rock aided the idea of Appleyard climbing and visualising Sara in the distance. My decision to have real green tendril wrapping the set pieces, highlighted how the land is dominating her opposing views of the world. Appleyard’s costume, hair and makeup is traditional of the time period.