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.