

DRAMA

Oliver Murrie

Fly Me to the Moon (Inspired by *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams)

REFLECTION STATEMENT

My HSC Individual Performance is a reimagining of Tom Wingfield's monologue from the 1940s American Realism play *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams. Williams' autobiographical monologue captures a meaningful journey of a young man, Tom, seeking an escape from his dull existence and the turbulent relationship with his mother for a greater purposeful adventure. The performance is set during the bleak economic period of the 1930s, a time which affected Americans economically and physiologically.

In order to bring Tom and, by extension, Williams' story to life, I researched both the social landscape of the 1930s and Williams' past, including the tense relationship he had with his mother, reflected in the play through Amanda Wingfield. By researching and understanding the struggles of Williams and the average middle class 1930s American, I was able to embody these attributes into my portrayal of Tom and enhance my conviction. Directorially, I attempted to achieve an intimate actor-audience relationship through close stage directions and theatrical sides, contrasted with Tom's intense exchange with his mother, to make the audience truly feel each sentiment. My rehearsal process, based on Stanislavski's techniques, consisted of finding reason behind each of Tom's lines. Despite the effectiveness of this technique in finding the truthfulness of Tom, he became one-dimensional, only demonstrating resentment. This encouraged me to insert further text which revealed a loving, personable side to Tom, helping to further empathise with the audience.

Inspired by the play, I was moved to centre my piece around a staircase, symbolic of Tom's desired escape from his painful mother and monotonous life. When further developing my set, I chose to signify Tom's mother and father through props. A wooden chair, stage right as Amanda, stiff and conservative and an empty picture frame, stage

left as Tom's absent father, highlighting their significance to Tom. I also moulded Frank Sinatra's famous song 'Fly Me to the Moon' into the piece, successfully emphasising Tom's desire for escape from life's confinement, evoking the same sense of wonder within the audience. It's my hope that my reimagining of Williams' play sparks within audiences the idea that instead of striving and imagining for escape, we must simply take action.

SCRIPT

A portable staircase sits on stage left. To stage right sits a lonesome chair and table. Tom enters centre stage carrying a suitcase as a distant train is heard. He puts the suitcase on the ground.

TOM

This is me, returning from my job with the continental shoemakers, the day-in day-out of my life. It's simple, boring, tiresome, repetitive, all the things I would like to think I'm not...Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse.

Beat.

Let us begin.

I was trapped in a four-wall existence that I grudgingly return home to every night.

Beat.

To my mother, Amanda, my sister, Laura... and my long absent father. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances, and skipped the light fantastic out of town.... His memory strangely revered by a larger than life size photograph that dominates our mantelpiece.

He has left me a legacy that I do not find easy to be a part of, my role in it to be the sole conspirator in the failure of all our lives.

Beat

Mother was a woman of actions as well as words.

He moves in front of the stairs.

I was watching the moon....

Tom begins singing and dancing in a dreamy state.

Fly me to the moon. Let me play among the stars-

I'll be in soon Mother.

Coming Mother!!

He exhales. He begins walking to the chair stage right.

It had been almost an hour since I returned home, there was very little doubt that Mother would soon find something wrong with what I was doing.

Tonight, it was the barbaric manner in which I ate dinner.

Tom sits on the chair, imitating his mother.

"Honey, don't push with your fingers. If you have to push something, the thing to push with is a crust of bread. And chew - chew! Animals have secretions in their stomach which enable them to digest food without mastication, but human beings are supposed to chew their food before they swallow it down. Eat food leisurely, son, and really enjoy it. A well-cooked meal has lots of delicate flavors that have to be held in the mouth for appreciation. So, chew your food and give your salivary glands a chance to function!"

I haven't enjoyed one bit of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It's you that makes me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take. Sickening - spoils my appetite - all this discussion of - animal's secretion - salivary glands - mastication!

He pauses for a moment. He begins to walk towards the staircase then stops and turns back.

Like, what in Christ's name am I supposed to do!?!... Ohhh. That's right Mother. No...

I haven't gone out of my senses, I've been driven out of them, by you! Just listen! I have no thing, no single thing... in my life, that I call my own... Why everything is... Yesterday! You confiscated my books - my books! You had the nerve to... And that insane Mr Lawrence in your house?! YOUR house!?!...

Who pays the rent on it?! Who makes a slave of himself in that warehouse every damn day!?!...

You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? You think I'm in love with the continental shoemakers? You think that I want to spend fifty-five years of my life down there in that Celotex interior with fluorescent tubes!?! Look, I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains than I go back in the mornings! But I go! Every time you come in yelling that Goddamn 'Rise and shine! Rise and shine!', I think to myself how lucky dead people are!... But I get up, and I go. For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and ever being. And you say that self - self's all I think of. Why, listen Mother, if self is what I thought of, I'd be where he is - GONE! As far as the system of transportation reaches!

I'm going to the movies.

Tom walks to the staircase, in a rage.

No... No, I'm going to the opium dens.

He laughs.

Yes, the opium dens. Dens of vice and criminals' hangouts, Mother. I've joined the Hogan gang, I'm a hired assassin, I carry a tommy gun around in a violin case. They call me killer, Killer Wingfield.

He jumps down the stairs. Runs around the front of the stage to the chair stage right.

That's right, I'm leading a double life, simple honest warehouse worker by day, and by night a dynamic tsar of the underworld. I wear a patch over one eye and a false moustache, sometimes I even put on green whiskers. On those occasions, they call me El Diablo... Oh I could tell you things that would make you sleepless. My enemies plan to dynamite this place. They're going to blow us sky high some night! You ugly babbling old witch!

He sits back on the seat, becoming the mother again.

"Go to the movies, just go, go to the moon you selfish dreamer".

Tom begins to slowly walk towards the staircase.

I didn't go to the moon. I went much further, I left St. Louis. and followed in my father's footsteps.

Tom sits down at the front of the staircase.

I would have stopped but I was pursued by something...

...taking me by surprise.

My sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes...

Tom begins to descend the staircase again and stands behind the picture frame.

I tried to leave you all behind, but I have been more faithful than I ever intended to be!... So, blow out your candles Mother and so good bye.

Lights slowly fade down. A distant train is heard again which gradually fades out.



