

Amelia Earhart: Flights of Fancy

by Will Huddleston

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The early history of flight, alcoholism, the pressure of fame, dreams failed and fulfilled, and the never-ending need for courage are the themes of this play. It's 1932 and Amelia Earhart is on her first great flight: a solo across the Atlantic. Her tiny cockpit becomes filled with specters of memory as she relives fragments of her life, fragments which challenge her right to fame and her ability as a pilot. Scenes flow seamlessly as she interacts with her family, including her alcoholic father; with other flyers; and finally with millionaire publisher George Putnam who arranged a money-making stunt flight where her fame and fortune were made. Now these memories and ghosts haunt Amelia on her trans-Atlantic solo, mocking her ambition and tormenting her with self-doubt. She summons her courage and completes the flight. Amelia goes on to become a genuinely accomplished pilot and American heroine. Her successes become the dreams of Mary B, a young girl to whom the flights of Amelia Earhart represent power, freedom, and the fulfillment of the deepest yearnings of her young heart.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The play was first produced in the spring of 1988 by the California Theatre Center, Gayle Cornelison, Artistic Director. The production was directed by Laurie Cole. The sets and lights were by Michael Essad, and costumes by Colleen Troy Lewis. Patrick Short provided original music. The Stage Manager was Anne Rhors. The play included the following cast:

AMELIA EARHART: Suzanne Montgomery

MURIEL EARHART: (and others) Michelle Six

AMY OTIS EARHART: (and others) Allison Rowley

EDWIN EARHART: (and others) Todd Roe Stratton

G.P. PUTNAM: (and others) Dirk Leatherman

CAST OF CHARACTERS

With doubling, 3 men and 3 women

Actress 1:

AMELIA EARHART: The famous aviatrix.

Actress 2:

MURIEL EARHART: The younger sister.

ELINOR SMITH: The young stunt flyer.

MARY B: The little girl who believes in Amelia.

KEYSTONE: French film photographer who looks like
Charlie Chaplin.

RUTH NICHOLS: A statue of the Flying Debutant.

Actress 3:

AMY OTIS EARHART: The mother.

NETA SNOOK (SNOOKY): The barnstormer who taught
Amelia how to fly.

MARY B'S MOTHER: The New Mexico housewife.

RUTH ELDER: A statue of the Flying Movie Star.

Actor 1:

EDWIN EARHART: The father.

G. P. PUTNAM: The millionaire publisher and husband.

CURLEY MARTIN: The Air Enthusiast's Club President.

SLIM GORDON: A navigator.

Actor 2:

BILL STULTZ: The skilled aviator who drinks.

RUDY LORENZO: The hot-dog Hollywood flyer.

JIMMY WALKER: The Mayor of New York.

Actor 3:

HARVEY FOURSTONES: The public relations man.

WINCHELL SMUTTS: A news reporter.

Additional parts are:

RADIO ANNOUNCER

CANADIAN SOLDIERS

PRESENTER OF AWARDS

SPECTERS OF MEMORY

TRAIN CONDUCTOR

PHOTOGRAPHER

SECRETARY

SETTING

The setting should suggest the paradox of flying. There is a sense of unlimited space, clouds, and endless sky. There is also the terrible confinement of an enclosed airplane cabin. Hamlet says, "I could be bound within a nutshell and think myself the Lord of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams." Most of what occurs in the play takes place in the dream-like imaginings of Amelia's mind as she flies solo across the Atlantic Ocean. The setting must be suggestive so that quick, dreaming changes of place and time can be managed throughout the play.

SCENE 1
Preparation for Flight

(AT RISE: It is May 20, 1932. AMELIA EARHART is discovered sitting at the controls of her single engine Vega. SFX: Thunder, lightning and airplane noise. She is attempting to become the first woman pilot to fly alone across the Atlantic Ocean.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER: We interrupt this broadcast to bring you a special bulletin. That queen of the air, Amelia Earhart, has taken off from Harbour Grace, Newfoundland, in an attempt to be the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. The weather bureau has reported that a string of storm systems have sprung up unexpectedly in the area. Our best wishes go with that brave little ladybird.

(SPECTERS appear, murmuring words and phrases from Amelia's memory adding to the lonely atmosphere of solo flight. After a brief time a figure dressed in bloomers appears in the clouds. It is Amelia's sister MURIEL.)

MURIEL: You come down from there, Amelia Earhart.

AMELIA: Muriel.

MURIEL: Mill-eee! I'm going to cry if you don't come down, right now. Millie, please!

AMELIA: Why is it when you're on a solo flight an airplane cabin gets to be the most crowded place on earth?

MURIEL: I don't like seeing the house all dark and empty like that.

AMELIA: Memories. Feelings and memories.

MURIEL: I'm afraid, Millie. We don't live there anymore, and I can hear the hannibals.

AMELIA: Oh, don't be such a goose, Pidge!

MURIEL: Let's go back. I want to be in the new house with Mommy and Poppy.

AMELIA: Talking to myself again. Freezing cold and my hands are sweating.

MURIEL: I'm scared, Millie. Say my favorite poem again.
Whenever you say my favorite poem it keeps the hannibals away.

AMELIA: I start saying poems from my childhood it's like a dam breaks. Memories come flooding in.

MURIEL: Please, Millie. They're getting closer. I can hear them all around. The airplane sound changes to the sound of cicadas.

AMELIA: Maybe it'll help.

MURIEL: Hurry, Millie. They're getting closer.

AMELIA: We'll say the poem and the lamplighter will come.
He'll be riding his bicycle, and he'll light the street lights all in a row to guide us home safe and sound.

MURIEL: Go on, Millie. "A little colt bronco," say it.

AMELIA: "A little colt bronco, loaned to the farm." I knew it, here they come.

(SPECTERS from Amelia's memory fill the stage. AMELIA rises and takes MURIEL'S hand. The Specters pick up the chanting of the Vachel Lindsay poem. The plane dissolves and Amelia's mother, AMY, appears.)

MURIEL and AMELIA:

"A little colt bronco, loaned to the farm
To be broken in time without fury or harm,
Yet black crows flew past you, shouting alarm,
Calling 'Beware,' with lugubrious singing..."

SPECTERS:

"The butterflies there in the bush were romancing,
The smell of the grass caught your soul in a trance,
So why be a-fearing the spurs and the traces,
O bronco that would not be broken of dancing?"

(AMELIA and MURIEL exit. The memory is from the girls' childhood - Atchison, Kansas - a yard at the home of Amelia's maternal grandparents.)

AMY: Come here, Amelia. How are your new bloomers working out?

End of Freeview

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