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Family Plays



A Reflection by
JEROME McDONOUGH

MIRRORS

“Our cast did so well: 4 all-state cast members, 7 all-state honorable mention, and 3 superior ratings. I was so proud of them.” (Ann Eckardt, Cody, Wyo.)

Drama. By Jerome McDonough. *Cast: 3m., 8w.* We know that history repeats itself. What about family patterns of life—do they also repeat? *Mirrors* shows two generations of a family simultaneously—the 1960’s family at Stage Right and the modern family at Stage Left, as if one were a mirror reflection of the other: the happiness, the sadness, the love, the hate, the dreams the reality. *Set: the region surrounding the homes of the Mansfield and Simons families. There are a great number of freedoms with time, from 1986 back to the mid-1920s. Costumes: simple, traditional outfits in most cases. Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: MM6.*

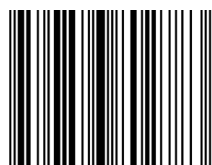
From the author: *Mirrors, a Reflection*, is a serious play, but it is not a somber one. There is much joy in the script and that joy should be played. An early draft included the line, “That’s what every funeral needs—a comedian.” The line didn’t work, but I still believe in the sentiment. Personally, I’d like to have my serious AND my comedy work quoted at my funeral. (And if one part has to be cut because of time or budget or something, let the heavy stuff slide.) But, after all, *Mirrors* is about death, isn’t it? Yes, but its real subject is life. And how we almost never realize its importance until some vital part of it is gone. Help your audience to realize. And help yourselves, too.

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Mirrors

MIRRORS

WIBBOBS

A Reflection

by

JEROME McDONOUGH

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311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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(MIRRORS)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

Dedication

To Jerome C. McDonough 1918-1982

I hope it's all right, Dad

and to the original cast:

**Nancy Adams, Dallas Gimpel, Leslie Hamilton, Gina Lucero,
Christy Moulder, Mark Tate, John Poston, Paul Ramirez,
Chris Whitehead, Suzi Kruger, Denise Melton, and Sandy Tate**

MIRRORS

Cast of Characters

The Mansfield family and friends:

GRACE Mansfield (1905-1961)—the mother

ELIZABETH Mansfield Simons (1931-1986)—daughter of Grace, wife of Denny Simons

TYSON Mansfield (1938-)—son of Grace. Narrator

VIRGINIA Jennings—confidante, friend, and contemporary of Grace

MARY JOYCE Simberman—community mourner, contemporary of Grace

HUGH Jennings—Minister, contemporary of Grace

The Simons family and friends:

DENNY Simons (1930-)—the father, husband of Elizabeth

AMBER (1955-)—the older daughter of Elizabeth and Denny

JILLANN (1958-)—the younger daughter

SHANNON Parker—female friend, confidante, and contemporary of Amber

CAL Lloyd—Minister, contemporary of Tyson (may be played by a woman, if necessary—change name to CALLIE)



PLACE

The Mansfield home (Stage Right)

The Simons home (Stage Left)

and the region surrounding these homes

TIME

October 23, 1961, and May 4, 1986

and the expanse of time between 1924 and the present

ABOUT THE PLAY

MIRRORS is a serious play, but it is not a somber one.

There is much joy in the script and that joy should be played. An early draft included the line, "That's what every funeral needs—a comedian." The line didn't work, but I still believe in the sentiment. Personally, I'd like to have my serious AND my comedy work quoted at my funeral. (And if one part has to be cut because of time or budget or something, let the heavy stuff slide.)

But, after all, MIRRORS is about death, isn't it? Yes, but its real subject is life. And how we almost never realize its importance until some vital part of it is gone.

Help your audience to realize. And help yourselves, too.

*—Jerome McDonough
May, 1987*

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Handbag, make-up, and mirror—Elizabeth
 A rose—Tyson
 Sweater, handbag, and hat—Virginia
 Large handbag—Mary Joyce
 Bible—Hugh
 Handbag, make-up, and mirror—Amber
 Handbag—Jillann
 Handbag—Shannon
 Bible—Cal

Costume and Appearance Notes

MIRRORS is at once a very easy and a very difficult show to costume. Costuming must seem suitable for a wide range of time and therefore not be immediately identifiable with any specific period. The original cast members dressed each character appropriately for the funeral day which was applicable to his or her generation.

The year of the original production, 1987, found fashions not too unlike those of the 1961 and 1986 funeral dates. Simple, tasteful traditional outfits were the rule. The playing of "younger" ages was physical and emotional—appearance factors were not addressed.

A brief description of each character's costuming is listed below:

GRACE—dark dress, length well below the knee, dark shoes; plain jewelry and rings; hair grayed but not pure gray
 ELIZABETH—navy blue dress, length below the knee; pearls; handbag with make-up kit
 TYSON—green Class A uniform of a Master Sergeant in the Marine Corps; head-gear was left off; jacket was removed for the "porch" scene; very short haircut
 VIRGINIA—"matronly" dark dress with some lighter-colored trim; hat; hair grayed; sweater for the first scene, left on the back of a kitchen chair as the lights come up
 MARY JOYCE—dark dress which always looked too young for her, especially since the same dress was worn on both funeral days; large handbag (with room for food); hair was grayed, but partially hidden under a hat for the Elizabeth visit
 HUGH—plain suit or ministerial robes
 DENNY—dark suit; jacket and tie removed for "boat" scene; tie worn loosened with no jacket for the "nothing's attached" scene
 AMBER—blue-and-dark-blue suit with lighter-colored shoes; handbag with make-up kit; tasteful jewelry
 JILLANN—suit, lighter in color than Amber's but still in the dark range; matching shoes and bag
 SHANNON—dark "slimming" dress with lighter accessories
 CAL—dark suit or ministerial robes

Lighting

The original production employed area lighting Left, Center, and Right. Each area was dimmable independently of the others. In addition, a follow spot was em-

played for all "memory" sections and as "fill" for the Down Center funeral scene. The spotlight was used at as low a setting as practical for each scene—suggesting a dream-like quality.

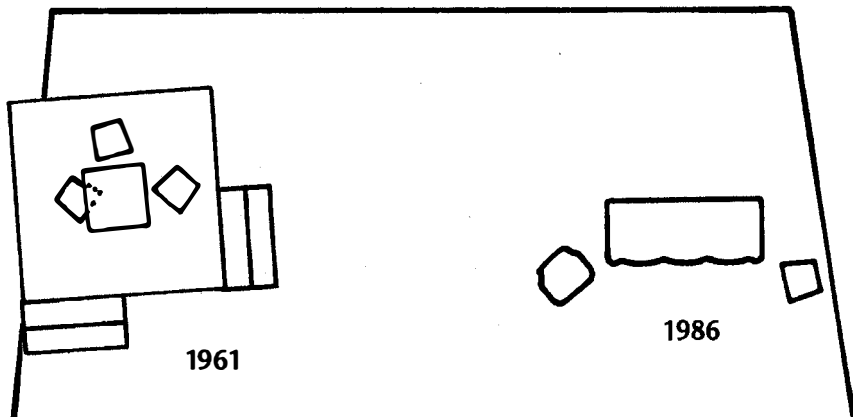
Even the simplest general lighting will suffice, but the ability to isolate each area helps the audience stay oriented in time and enhances the "floating" feeling of the play.

Music Notes

The original production carried the "Jesus Loves Me" motif of the "Mother's trio" scene throughout the play. The melody line of the hymn was played through once, very slowly and freely, for the opening and closing of the show. To guarantee consistent quality, the piano solo was pre-recorded.

Other groups may wish to choose another song or compose an original piece. Whatever fits the temperament and lifestyle of the community will do so long as the interpretation is simple and gentle.

The Set



Scale: 1/8" = 1'

Stage Right: A 1961 kitchen (table and chairs on a platform, with steps leading to Down Right and Stage Center)

Stage Left: A 1986 living room (couch and a few chairs placed at random)

Entrances are through stage curtains, as desired.

MIRRORS

By Jerome McDonough

NOTE TO READERS

MIRRORS takes a great number of freedoms with time. Basic action takes place on one day in 1961 and one day in 1986. The complete action, however, stretches from the present day back into the mid-1920's. To assist the reader with keeping these time frames straight, a system of "realities" dictates the type faces used in the script:

The 1961 time frame, **ELIZABETH's reality**, is set in boldface type, like this paragraph. Action and reminiscences in this face relate to the death of GRACE and to the youth of ELIZABETH and TYSON. Stage directions which apply to this reality are also set in boldface, inside brackets.

The 1986 time frame, AMBER's reality, is set in sans-serif italics, like this paragraph. Action and reminiscences in this face relate to the death of ELIZABETH and to the youth of AMBER and JILLANN. Applicable stage directions are in the same type inside brackets.

The character of TYSON alone spans the entire time frame and his "current-day" sections are in standard type, like this paragraph. General stage directions and sections which cover multiple realities are in the same type in brackets.

[AT RISE: A simple MELODY, played slowly on single keys of a piano, is heard. The stage is bare except for a few chairs and a couch arranged at Stage Left to suggest a 1986 living room and a table and a few chairs on a raised platform at Stage Right to suggest a 1961 kitchen. Steps lead down from the platform to Down Right and Center. The area downstage of the kitchen will become the back porch. Between these two settings is a void at Stage Center. Action at Stage Left will take place in 1986. Stage Right action takes place in 1961. The void between may relate to either side and generally serves as a "memory" or recollection area.

A simple wash illuminates the stage, but front lights are not up yet. Front lights should be controllable to isolate each of the three stage areas—Right, Left, and Center—individually. A follow spot may be used for TYSON's current-day sequences and/or for reminiscences from either reality.

TYSON, a 48-year-old man wearing the Class A uniform of a Master Sergeant in the United States Marine Corps, enters from far Down Right or from a side stage, Right. The FOLLOW SPOT finds him. He looks across the stage, scanning the width of it and even off past the Left arch. He moves to Down Center, speaking to the audience]

TYSON. Life seems to be marked by endings. We don't even notice when things start—but when they're over . . . But I'm ahead of myself. My name's Tyson Mansfield. And these [pointing to Stage Right and Left, in turn] are two houses where I spent some time.

[Front LIGHTS up, Right. **ELIZABETH**, a 30-year-old woman, enters from Right with a stack of papers which she spreads out on the kitchen table and starts to shuffle through and organize as **TYSON** continues speaking]

TYSON. That girl—Elizabeth Mansfield—had been around for seven years when I arrived in 1938 and she always thought the place was more hers than mine. Older sisters are like that. [*Front LIGHTS up Left. AMBER, a 31-year-old woman, enters from Left, picks up a telephone, dials it and begins a mimed conversation as TYSON gestures to the Left setting*] This house happened in 1953 when Elizabeth married Denny Simons. That's their older girl, Amber. I met her in 1955—when she was quite young. [Pause, looking Right and Left] The distance between these two houses right now is—oh—about 25 years— [pointing to the Right setting] **October 23, 1961**, and [pointing to the Left setting] **May 4, 1986**. Both homes are in mourning. [Crossing to Down Left] And this—this thing you're watching—is memories—memories of how far apart those homes are, how far apart lifetimes of calendar dates are, and about how often they're in the exact same spot.

[**TYSON** leans against the wall, Down Left; FOLLOW SPOT out as **MARY JOYCE** is heard from off Right]

MARY JOYCE. Hello? Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. [Seeing her through a "door" toward Down Right] Mrs. Simberman, come in. [**MARY JOYCE SIMBERMAN**, the perpetual mourner and crepe hanger, enters. She is of indeterminate age but it is not a young indeterminate age]

MARY JOYCE. Mary Joyce Simberman is always an early caller. I rushed over as soon as I heard. Such a terrible thing, the loss of your mother.

ELIZABETH. Yes.

MARY JOYCE. A young woman like that. May she rest in peace. Grace and I were girls together. [Looking around] Could I sit down? Those new buses make me so nauseous—with their stinking diesel fumes—fancy 1961 models—who needs them? But—what was I saying?

ELIZABETH. You and Mother were girls together.

MARY JOYCE. Grace was several years ahead of me in school, of course, but we younger girls looked up to her.

ELIZABETH. I'm sure.

MARY JOYCE. [Looking into dining room off Right] It's good there's plenty of food. I wanted to put a dish together for you, but I was so upset that I couldn't even lift a spoon. [Rising and looking at the food, off Right] A woman like me, living alone after her husband dies, doesn't feel like cooking.

ELIZABETH. We'll never be able to eat all that food. Won't you take some home?

MARY JOYCE. Food from a grieving family? Better to take it from starving widows in the Far East.

ELIZABETH. It will just be wasted.

MARY JOYCE. Well, maybe a tiny plate for my dinner. Waste is a terrible thing. And I might eat a little something now. To recover from that smelly bus ride.

ELIZABETH. If you think you're strong enough.

MARY JOYCE. Oh, I always manage, Elizabeth. My Herbert used to say, "Mary Joyce, I depend on you for . . ." well, I don't remember what, but he depended on me for everything. Except driving. He did that. It's the buses for me now. [A small cough] Diesel buses.

ELIZABETH. Uncle James is here for the funeral. Why don't I ask him to drive you home when you're ready?

MARY JOYCE. Oh, I couldn't impose on Grace's brother at a time like this.

ELIZABETH. He'd be glad to take you.

MARY JOYCE. Well, we HAVE been properly introduced. [A beat—not a very long one] Your uncle—how is his wife doing these days?

ELIZABETH. Uncle James never married.

MARY JOYCE. The poor man. And so attractive, too. [She starts to move toward the food offstage, adjusting her clothing as she exits, speaking to the unseen Uncle James] James, I rushed over as soon as I heard. Such a terrible thing, the loss of your older sister. [ELIZABETH

watches Mary Joyce's exit with amusement, then returns to her sorting as TYSON speaks]

TYSON. [Visible in the Left light] It's a little later now and a close friend is in each home. Closeness helps with the healing.

[Scenes will take place both Left and Right for a time now. Subdued mimed action will continue in the out-of-focus area during scenes on the opposite side]

SHANNON. [*Entering Left, going through pieces of mail*] *Being a busybody is so handy, Amber. Here I am, reading your mail with no guilt at all.*

AMBER. *Probably nothing but bills, Shannon.*

SHANNON. *I never snoop into bills. Nobody sends raunchy bills. [Looking at more mail] Here's a sympathy card from Shelly Benson.*

AMBER. *Let me see it.*

SHANNON. [*Handing her the envelope*] *There was a bouquet from your office. I put it on the mantel.*

AMBER. [*Reading card*] *Nice of Shelly to think of us.*

SHANNON. [*Checking another letter*] *Did you know that . . . [pretending to read] "You may have already won seventy-three billion dollars in small unmarked bills"?*

[Focus shifts to Right as VIRGINIA, an older woman, enters from Right, speaking]

VIRGINIA. The food that's left is out on the dining room table. If anybody's hungry, they can just take what they want. Arranging it was easy once Mary Joyce got through. [ELIZABETH hasn't been listening] Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. [Looking up] Sorry, Virginia. I'm still not thinking quite straight. I appreciate your help.

VIRGINIA. It's good having something to do. The only exercise I get any more is standing up and sitting down at my friends' funerals. [Realizing] What am I saying?

ELIZABETH. It's all right.

VIRGINIA. [Exiting to tend to something else] That's what comes with being old—you can say any fool thing you like and get away with it. I'll go wake Tyson. He'll want to help choose the flowers. [VIRGINIA moves off as ELIZABETH sits, lost in her thoughts]

AMBER. [*Reading a telegram*] *Candace Tandy is sending a donation to the church in Mother's memory.*

SHANNON. *Do I know her?*

AMBER. *She was Candy Bonnett.*

SHANNON. *Oh, yeah. She married some guy—what was his name—Randy?*

AMBER. *Andy.*

SHANNON. *That's it. [Assuming a very sweet face, saying it Romper Room style] Candy and Andy Tandy. [Dropping the sweetness] I may have kidded them about that.*

AMBER. *Only until they went back to their full names in self-defense.*

SHANNON. *Helping people is my life.*

AMBER. *[Looking off Left] I thought Jillann would be here by now. Her plane was due at ten.*

SHANNON. *She isn't riding her broom?*

AMBER. *[Chiding] Shannon.*

SHANNON. *I call people the way I see them, including your sister.*

AMBER. *Uncle Tyson went after her. Maybe they stopped by the funeral home.*

SHANNON. *[As if hearing something off Left] What? . . . Okay, I'm coming.*

AMBER. *[She didn't hear anything] Who is it?*

SHANNON. *The food is calling me. [AMBER shakes her head as SHANNON moves off Left. AMBER resumes reading]*

TYSON. *Memories don't follow rules. Yesterday can seem a hundred years in the past—and our childhood barely a moment ago.*

[ELIZABETH rises from her chair, Right, and moves quickly into the void, Down Right Center. FOLLOW SPOT up Center, FRONT LIGHTS down Left and Right. ELIZABETH assumes the physical aspect of a young girl as GRACE, Elizabeth and Tyson's mother, enters Up Center]

GRACE. *Elizabeth Mansfield, you come down from that tree this instant!*

ELIZABETH. *[Looking up, as if almost able to touch the sky above her] I've never climbed this high before, Mama.*

GRACE. *[Moving to Center, looking toward Down Center] Or gotten down so fast. The very idea, climbing a tree in your Sunday dress.*

ELIZABETH. *But I'm the best tree climber in school, Mama.*

GRACE. *You'll be the sorest if you're not down in half a second. What if Brother Stone came by and saw your underwear flapping out for the whole world to see?*