'Let Mom — Fly to The Moon'

My son’s Ilias Savage Meditation on Mythic Violence and Theatrical Cruelty



There are plays that challenge audiences, and then there are plays that assault them. Ilia’s "Let Mom — Fly to The Moon" belongs firmly in the latter category, and perhaps in a third category yet unnamed: plays that challenge the very notion of what theatre can or should be. Staged in an abandoned ceramic workshop beneath the rubble of the Berlin Wall, this threehour descent into theatrical hell is less a drama than an exorcism, a savage meditation on violence, family, and the price of creation that makes Tracy Letts look like Neil Simon.

The setting itself announces Ilias's ambitions. A half-scrapped school bus covers a Corinthian well where the factory once dumped sewage—and where a MOM hangs upside down by one foot for much of the play. The studio belongs to Bedlam, a pompous Classics professor running something called the "Medea Studio," an experimental laboratory investigating the young life of Princess Dorian of Corinth. But this is no archaeological dig. What Ilias excavates here are the rotting foundations of Western culture itself: the violence encoded in our origin myths, the cruelty embedded in our family structures, the fascism lurking in our theatres.

The play's six characters are all identified as vampires—"semi-powdered"—and the designation is both literal and metaphorical. They feed on each other, on their audience, on theatrical tradition itself. Bedlam manipulates cloth Furies on strings while drinking "thick, fuming liquid" that sizzles when it hits the floor. His sister Jett, a leading interpreter of Ancient Drama, is also revealed to be Dorian's mother—the family tree here is as twisted as anything in Greek tragedy. Dorian, described as a "young hermaphrodite" and creative writing curator, becomes the play's moral centre, if such a thing exists in this landscape of absolute cruelty.

Then there's Vlad, identified as a "National Socialist student of Classical Philology" and Dorian's lover—a character so provocative that his mere presence onstage becomes an act of theatrical terrorism. The Nazi symbolism is not background texture but central to Katsis's argument: fascism isn't some external threat to civilization but civilization's darkest flower, the logical endpoint of Western culture's obsession with purity, hierarchy, and violent transcendence.

A Theatre of Cruelty Taken to Its Limit

Katsis clearly knows his Artaud. This is Theatre of Cruelty stripped of safety rails and pushed past any reasonable limit. The opening scene establishes the play's grotesque poetry: MOM, straining upward as the Erinyes snag her hair, is repeatedly dunked into the well by Dorian, who yo-yos her up and down while Bedlam kicks a dangling tambourine in rhythm. "Break it, girl," he commands, and break it she does—along with every convention of naturalistic theatre, every comfort of psychological realism, every pretense that what we're watching is somehow metaphorical rather than actual.

The violence is relentless and unnervingly specific. The prop list reads like an inventory from Hieronymus Bosch: a taxidermied imperial eagle that serves as silent witness to the carnage, brass knuckles, a bayonet, a "small bloody drum," a revolver. When the stage directions note "vomiting into well: use prepped vessel/gel; sanitize; no slip-on lip; splash guard inside well," we're reminded that this theatrical vision requires extensive safety protocols. The gap between the imagined horror and the practical considerations of stage combat creates its own kind of vertigo.

But Ilias isn't interested in violence for its own sake—or rather, he's interested in interrogating our consumption of staged violence, our willingness to watch cruelty when it's framed as "art." The play's most devastating moments come when the theatrical frame collapses entirely. When MOM is dunked in the well, when Jett is stabbed with the bayonet, when Dorian smears her mother's blood on her own face and declares "Same blood"—these aren't representations of violence. They're acts that happen in real time, to real bodies, witnessed by real audiences who paid to be there.

Medea Reimagined Through Layers of Horror

The play's relationship to Euripides' Medea is complex and often contradictory. MOM insists she's not Medea but Cassandra, "the only survivor of my family." Dorian recounts a version of Medea's story in which the children were thrown to pigs before she could kill them herself. The Chorus of Erinyes accuses MOM of butchering her brother "for a marriage token," of hurling him "into the bloody Pontus." But every invocation of the myth is immediately undercut, questioned, or recontextualized through modern horror.

What emerges is less a retelling than a palimpsest—layers of violence written over each other until the original text becomes almost illegible. Ilias suggests that Greek tragedy didn't invent these patterns but merely documented them, that the violence in our myths reflects the violence in our families, our theatres, our selves. When Dorian declares late in the play, "This is truth," and Vlad responds, "This is bullshit," we're left to navigate that gap ourselves.

The play's treatment of MOM is particularly complex. Hanging upside down for most of the action, she becomes simultaneously victim and scapegoat, simultaneously innocent and guilty of some unnameable crime. Her children abuse her with casual cruelty—"Ma—zip it. And pull up your panties"—while also seeming to reenact her own failures as a mother. The cycle of abuse is presented not as psychological pathology but as theatrical tradition, as something we pay to see.

The Unbearable Weight of the Sponsorship

Bill, described simply as "major sponsor from the Homeland," represents the economic forces that make such theatrical experiments possible—and complicit. His presence in the play functions as a constant reminder that someone is funding this carnage, that violence requires infrastructure, that every avant-garde gesture needs institutional support. When he declares, "You're broke. You're insane. You're surrounded by ghosts and garbage. You need me," it's both literal and damning.

The play's political content is impossible to ignore. Vlad's identification as a National Socialist isn't decoration—it's central to Ilias's argument about the relationship between high culture and fascism, between classical education and contemporary violence. When Vlad stabs Jett with the bayonet in Act III, the stage directions specify that he does so "with a

dragging ceremonial step," transforming murder into ritual, politics into theatre, history into spectacle.

And yet, there's something almost unbearably honest about this approach. Ilias doesn't pretend that making "political theatre" absolves anyone—not the artists who create it, not the sponsors who fund it, not the audiences who consume it. The imperial eagle on Bedlam's desk, taxidermied and silent, watches everything but never speaks. When Bedlam finally begs it to speak in the play's climactic moment, the silence is deafening. Power doesn't explain itself. It just watches.

The Matricidal Climax and Its Aftermath

The play builds toward not one but two murders: first MOM, apparently killed offstage, her corpse brought out and examined by the family with grotesque fascination. Then Jett, stabbed by Vlad while Dorian watches, "calm, still writing." The stage directions for Jett's death are extraordinarily detailed and disturbing: Vlad plunges the bayonet into her back "at the heart," smears her blood on Dorian's cheeks, and Jett tries to kiss her daughter one last time before dying.

Dorian's response is the play's most devastating moment. She compares her mother's blood to her own—"Same blood"—then leans close to examine Jett's dying eyes: "Same irises. Photograph my image. The last image you'll remember." It's narcissism at its most extreme, and also something stranger: a daughter trying to see herself reflected in her mother's death, trying to understand if their shared violence makes them kin or enemies.

The play's final moments descend into near-chaos. The Furies drop from the ceiling, the tape recorder explodes with laughter, candles blow out leaving only moonlight. The family circles MOM's corpse like worshippers at some obscene altar. Dorian reads aloud from her notes: "The mother dies, the sister smokes, the professor binds. The lover rants, the sponsor buys. The eagle never speaks." It's summary as epitaph, documentation as elegy.

When Vlad tries to attack Dorian and Bedlam tackles him, blood from Bedlam's wound seeps into the bandages wrapped around MOM's corpse. "Everyone stares at it—red seeping into white." The living and the dead are bound together by blood, by violence, by the unstoppable machinery of the play itself. And then, in a moment of strange beauty amid the carnage, Vlad mounts a pallet with his bayonet in "silent anthem pose" while Dorian taps a small bloody drum "soft. Matches his mute howls."

The Question of Endurance

The obvious question is whether "Let Mom — Fly to The Moon" is actually any good, or whether it's simply punishing. Elijah has created a work so uncompromising, so relentlessly dark, that traditional critical categories seem inadequate. This isn't a play that wants to be liked. It wants to be reckoned with. And reckoning is always painful.

The writing is often extraordinary—dense with literary and mythological references, switching registers from academic pomposity to street profanity, from Greek quotations to contemporary slang. The stage directions alone constitute a kind of prose poem, detailing the physical and emotional landscape with obsessive precision. When Jett "lifts her leg crudely and passes gas" after vomiting into the well, it's both grotesque comedy and devastating punctuation—the human body asserting itself against theatrical pretension.

But there's also something exhausting about the play's determination to shock. By the third act, when Dorian emerges "wearing only an unbuttoned leather jacket, white panties, and

black Martens boots," when Vlad stabs Jett and blood is smeared and corpses move, the accumulation of transgression risks becoming merely numbing. Elijah seems aware of this risk—the repeated references to theatre itself, to performance and audience, suggest he's interrogating the very mechanisms of shock he deploys.

The play's final line—Dorian's quiet observation that "The bird never spoke. The rest was us"—is both profound and evasive. Yes, the imperial eagle's silence means that all the violence, all the cruelty, all the horror was human-generated. Power doesn't impose itself; we perform it ourselves, generation after generation, in families and theatres and nations. But acknowledging this doesn't absolve anyone. The play's blackout comes not with catharsis but with exhaustion.

The Theatre We Deserve

Ilias has written something genuinely radical here—a play that uses the forms of ancient tragedy to indict both those forms and our contemporary addiction to them. The very fact that "Let Mom — Fly to The Moon" exists as a performable text raises uncomfortable questions about what we're willing to stage, to witness, to call art. The detailed safety protocols in the script—"never point at humans; chamber check before each run"—remind us that real bodies will enact this violence nightly, that audiences will pay to watch.

Is this the theatre we need? The question assumes Theatre should be therapeutic, enlightening, somehow improving. Ilias rejects that entirely. His theater wounds deliberately, refuses healing, offers no redemption. It's closer to what Susan Sontag called "an aesthetic of cruelty"—art that doesn't represent violence but enacts it, that makes complicit everyone who participates.

And yet, there's something undeniably powerful about a work that refuses all comfort. In an age of safe spaces and trigger warnings, Ilias has created a play that triggers everything—and then insists we sit with the discomfort. The Berlin Wall setting is perfect: this is theatre built on ruins, emerging from the rubble of failed ideologies, contaminated by history's violence. The ceramic workshop, with its well of sewage and scrapped bus, becomes a kind of archaeological site where we excavate not artifacts but our own capacity for cruelty.

The play's title—"Let Mom — Fly to The Moon"—remains mysterious throughout. No one flies anywhere in this play. MOM hangs upside down, is dunked in sewage, and eventually dies. The title suggests escape, transcendence, some impossible liberation. But the dash, that long pause between "Mom" and "Fly," tells the truth: there's a gap between the wish and the reality, between what we want for our mothers and what we actually give them. Between letting go and holding down.

In the end, "Let Mom — Fly to The Moon" is less a play than an ordeal. It's brilliant, exhausting, infuriating, and impossible to forget. Elijah has created a work that makes most contemporary theatre look timid by comparison—and makes us question whether bravery and recklessness are really so different. This is theatre as wound, theatre as crime scene, theatre as confession. It's not entertainment. It's barely even art. It might be something more important: truth without anaesthesia, served raw.

Whether audiences will—or should—endure such truth is another question entirely. But at least Elijah has the courage to ask it. In a theatrical landscape dominated by comfortable revivals and safe experimentalism, "Let Mom — Fly to The Moon" is genuinely dangerous. It doesn't want to entertain you. It wants to implicate you. And by the time the lights come up, it already has.

Cassandras′ advisory: Extreme violence, graphic content, Nazi imagery, sexual content, family abuse (duh — duh)