

**The following is a composite of journal made up of entries written by students in the 2008-2009 session of the *Theater in London* Class. The names, school years, and majors of the authors follow each entry. In some cases multiple entries for a single play are provided so as to allow the reader to see how different students responded to the same performance.**

***Cinderella* (2008). Dir. Melly Still. Based on Brothers Grimm *Aschenputtel*. Written by Ben Power and Melly Still. Lyric Hammersmith Theatre**

The Lyric Hammersmith Theatre has a reputation for unique and alternative Christmas shows, and this version of *Cinderella* certainly didn't disappoint. The play not only models itself after the original Grimm Brother's *Aschenputtel* but also incorporates elements of other traditional folk tales to add depth to the backgrounds of the characters. It is a darker and more introspective *Cinderella* than the Perrault-based Disney version many are familiar with, but it is by no means less tender. The depth of character development and psychological intricacy of this production are, in my opinion, its greatest strengths; though at times I felt the storytelling could have been less convoluted. I admired the *Pulp-Fiction*-esque timeline and its contribution to the dreaming landscape of the production, but I was occasionally distracted from the performance while trying to sort through the multiple myths and multiple timelines in my head.

Another thing I admired about this production was the characterization of the step-sisters: they are not exactly sympathetic but are portrayed in a less harsh light than in most *Cinderella* tales I have read. Still's step-sisters are not one-dimensionally evil or ugly, but are simply young girls who do not think through their actions. They bully Cinderella, yes, but it is a sisterly bullying that is encouraged primarily by the viciousness of the step-mother. Seeing the step-

mother in the guise of a mother (in relation to her natural daughters) makes her no less despicable; though she obviously favors them, she has ruined her daughters and raised them as thoughtless, selfish beings. It comes down to the nature versus nurture question. Sure, the step-sisters probably had a propensity for a mean streak in their inherent personalities, but it was their mother who nurtured and cultivated it. In Perrault, unlike Grimm, the ugly step-sisters are forgiven and even rewarded with palace rooms and court husbands by Cinderella.

Both of these endings seem very extreme, in my opinion, but at least Still makes some attempt to mitigate matters with her distribution of eye-gouging. Even though the step-sisters are creatures of habit molded by their mother's influence, they are adults in the end and have some responsibility for their actions. They each get one eye gouged out by Cinderella's birds. The step-mother, on the other hand, corrupted not only herself but her daughters by teaching them to abuse Cinderella. She gets both eyes gouged out (one for each corrupted child?) by birds.

The music by Terje Isungset was very unique. Initially I wasn't sure I liked it, but as the play progressed I found the music and mood to coalesce into a symbiotic partnership; neither would be as powerful or moving without the other. One interesting aspect of the music was Isungset's physical location on the stage. Save for the moments when he was on the stage floor among the actors playing an ice trumpet or mouth-harp, his "Norwegian orchestra" (Isungset's one-man band and a plethora of unique percussion instruments) is placed at the pinnacle of the stage atop a beautifully rising, winding staircase for the majority of the play. From a technical perspective, this makes sense because putting him in a pit would bury his amazing musical talent and the strange instruments themselves from the audience's view, thus taking away from the enjoyment of the play. Putting him above the stage allows him to remain a constant presence without interfering with any stage direction occurring below him. His music is primal, driving,

and otherworldly; it is integral to the production in creating an atmosphere of ice, despair, passion, and hope to drive the play forward.

-Beverly Ferguson (Class of 2009 Eastman/English)

**M. R. James, Two Ghost Stories: “Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” and “The Ash Tree.” Barons Court Theatre**

This recitation of M.R. James' two ghost stories "Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You My Lad" and "The Ash Tree" introduced me to my first London pub theatre, the Baron's Court. It is located on the lower floor of the Curtain's Up Pub and is comprised of a few rows of tightly packed chairs in between (and behind) several pillars obscuring a tiny stage. As one reviewer put it, the theatre was "Intimate to the point where if you tried to read a paper you'd end up more or less violating the person next to you." Though the space obviously left much to be desired, it actually worked quite well in terms of atmosphere for the reading of the ghost stories, and the performer R.M. Lloyd Parry was phenomenally talented.

Parry sat in a cushy armchair surrounded by antique furniture, musty tomes, candelabras, and a decanter of brandy. The only lighting in the room came from the glow of the candles, which Parry strategically blew out at key points in his story-telling to darken the mood and increase the mystery. I really liked the dark setting because it made me forget the fact that I was in the cramped basement of a pub and allowed me to believe I was really sitting in this old scholar's study, listening to a ghost story.

Admittedly, the experience was not without its low points. At times during the first tale ("The Ash Tree"), the narrator's voice became monotonous to my ears which, coupled with the darkened room, briefly lulled me to sleep. It probably didn't help that the only thing I had for

dinner was a beer and chips. The tale itself was well-written, of course, but what made it less disturbing than the second story was that there was a logical (though supernatural) reason for the events that occurred: a witch had cursed the man who testified against her in a witch trial to a horrible death as well as generations of his family to come. Yes, it is strange and otherworldly, but at least there was some sort of understandable force of vengeance behind the acts. The next tale, however, offered no such answers and thus taps into every reasonable mind's fear of the unknown and the unknowable.

The second story, M. R. James' masterpiece "Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You My Lad," held me completely rapt. There was not a dull moment during the performance, from the beginning supper scene between Cambridge professors (during which the actor actually ate from a bowl of soup), to the shocking clatter of the bowl and tray at a key moment of horror during the tale, to the use of a handkerchief to describe the horrid face of the creature tormenting the main character: "...a horribly, an intensely horrible, face of crumpled linen." That may sound benign out of context, but the magic of the evening was Parry's (and, of course, James') ability to slowly fill us with anxiety by suppressing the manifestation of true horror until our nerves have been ever-so-subtly whittled down. The main character, Parkins, was a man devoted to his sense of reason; too devoted. He was rational to the point of deliberately forcing himself to disbelieve events that occurred before his very eyes if they did not align with his sense of logic. This was his failing; if he had acknowledged even the smallest sense of apprehension within him, he would have refrained from foolishly charging into what he did not understand (i.e. blowing the random whistle he found with archaic inscriptions and summoning the horrible ghost).

-Beverly Ferguson (Class of 2009 Eastman/English)

***Cinderella (2008). Dir. Peter Denyer. Written by Susie McKenna. New Wimbledon Theatre***

The moment that I saw the elaborate sign for the production of *Cinderella* written by Susie McKenna and directed by Peter Denyer above the door of the New Wimbledon Theatre I was reminded of my childhood. The first time I experienced theater was when my parents brought my cousins and I to see Disney on Ice and Sesame Street Live. Attending these performances was the highlight of my year when I was young because it was so exciting to see the characters I knew so well right in front of me instead of on television. Another exciting aspect of going to these performances were the toys and candy they would sell at every exit of the theater. Looking back, I realize that it might have been foolish to be so focused on getting my parents to buy me a souvenir, but that was part of the excitement. As I watched parents and children waiting in line in the concession stands at the New Wimbledon Theatre, I was again reminded of my first time in the theater. As I moved deeper into the theater, I began to see the stark cultural differences between the English pantomime and the American Disney on Ice and Sesame Street Live. The first indication that pantomime is distinct from American children's theater is its deep tradition. I realized this when I came upon a display case in the hallway of the theatre with the theme "What was your first panto?" Pictures and writings from children and adults were posted there and I enjoyed reading them because these people's memories gave me a glimpse into what it's like to be an English child and how important the first panto experience is. I remember thinking, "this is my first panto, I'm a little kid again!" That thought let me become a child again, which I believe to be the pantomime's purpose for the older audience. However cliché its sounds, it is true that we are all young at heart.

One of the things I was focused on when I was watching this *Cinderella* pantomime was how the production introduced several different concepts to the children. The first and most

obvious was the art of theater and performance. When the Fairy Godmother, played by Louise Dearman, appeared in the beginning of the play she promptly broke down the fourth wall by addressing the audience. Breaking the fourth wall and including the children in the stage action is widely used in children's theater in American as well. I think that this technique is a successful way to introduce children to theater because it eases them into the illusion that the action on stage is not real. It may be hard for children to understand the characters and the story is not reality and including them in the action of the play allows them to hold onto the fantasy of theater. Later in the play, the children were given a dose of reality when Buttons, played by American Ronn Lucas, admits to the children that he is a ventriloquist and this provides the voice and movement for his puppet characters. I was worried that this confession would destroy the fantasy for the children, but the fact that Buffalo Bill argued with Buttons about his voice bolstered it. The children were presented with the idea that what is happening on stage is not real through the fantasy itself.

*Cinderella* not only introduced children to theater, but to English culture. The first time that Cinderella, played by Joanna Page, speaks it is clear that her English accent sounds different than the accents of the other characters. We come to learn that she has decided to do a Welsh accent throughout the play, a fact which distresses her father Baron Hardup, played by famous impressionist Alastair McGowan, who must give his entrance spiel over again in a Welsh accent in order to match Cinderella's. While on the surface this is an opportunity written into the play in order to highlight Alastair McGowan's talents, it also introduces the idea to the children that there are people from different areas of Great Britain who may be different than them. This message is expanded with the discussion of Buttons' nationality—the children are introduced to Americans by the casting Ronn Lucas. Several of my colleagues have expressed their opinion

that *Cinderella* had a shallow plot, while that might be true for adults like us, from a child's innocent perspective it is plenty deep.

-Kristine Wadowsky (Class of 2009 English/Biological Sciences: Molecular Genetics)

**Harold Pinter. *No Man's Land* (1975). Dir. Rupert Gould. Duke of York's Theatre**

For me, the hardest part is knowing where to start a tale. The initial touch of pencil to paper or finger to keyboard is a terrifying one because you are committing yourself to what you put down and are forced to stand behind it, whether it is a success or failure. The same is true for relationships as well. That initial introduction, that mustering of enough courage to just say "hello" is hard enough, but continuing from there is even harder. Once you say hello, how do you move into a deeper understanding of the person to whom you are speaking? Can you even form an understanding of them? This appears to be where Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land* begins. From the initial words of Hirst offering Spooner a drink, to the final words (Hirst: "I'll drink to that"), *No Mans Land* is a play that leaves the audience with a slew of questions but no answers. From somewhat 'mundane' questions such as "what are the characters' relationships to one another", to more philosophical questions such as "can you really know someone", *No Man's Land* asks the audience to question the very fabric of its constructed reality. Even the seemingly mundane questions are not what they appear. Just by asking what are the characters' relationships, one is probing the idea of the truth. How do they really know each other? What is the true story behind these two characters? Then one must ask oneself, what is real and what is true. Although it seems like the plot from *The Matrix*, these are questions that failed to be answered on a daily basis. *No Man's Land* explores the reasons behind why these questions can never truly be answered.

The play begins with the concept that language is ineffectual, and thus unable to convey a person's intended meaning. Therefore, how does one convey that meaning? During the first act, Spooner begins explaining to Foster about how he almost painted a scene and entitled it "The Whistler", Spooner then asks if the title would confuse Foster as the subject matter would not be easily identifiable. To which Foster replies: "The name would baffle me, but I would appreciate the artwork. Did you hear that? I said I would appreciate the artwork". This line stood out to me because it clearly defines the difference between meaning and description. Also, the lack of action and different uses of inflections when speaking during the performance often lends a meaning to words that might not be intended. For example, the play on the word 'buns' when Spooner is describing his mother's baking skills. When Spooner mentions that his mother's buns were the best, did he mean, innocently, that her baking was good, or did he mean, as we all chuckled at, the incestuous notion that she indeed had fine buttocks? We use actions such as head and hand motions and facial expressions to help determine the intended meaning of what we hear. The actions coupled with inflections allow the listener to differentiate between words, in this case buns as in baked goods, and buns as in slang for buttocks. The lack of actions and the intentional misuse of inflections show just how unreliable current forms of communication may be. However, what this play does not do is illuminate a way to remedy this problem. That leads me to ask if there is a way to solve the 'communication dilemma'. One way I can think of is to create an individual and unique word for each and every item and emotion in the universe.

However, this would never happen in actuality. There are so many ideas and emotions that are inexpressible through the spoken word. Also, there are so many things that are considered taboo by society that the conversion of everyday words into slang usage will always develop to express these ideas. This leads to the idea of things being hidden as expressed in



Cinderella. The true intended meaning is hidden behind this mask of words, and it is the job of the listener to uncover the intentions, however, what is uncovered is not always accurate.

Another question to ask, though, is how much does one really want to uncover? In the case of Spooner and Hirst, it was uncovered that Hirst slept with Spooner's wife, ultimately leading to her leaving Spooner. In this case, Spooner uncovers the fact that he really does not know his 'friend' Hirst. This in turn begs the question: can you really know someone? What does one use to develop ideas and thoughts about people? Is it their relationship with their family: they are good parents, kind siblings, caring children? Or their relationship with mutual acquaintances: Bobby's girlfriend, Alice's father, Hirst's friend? Do we use auxiliary relationships to promote relationships with others: I am John's friend and you are John's friend, therefore we must share something in common with John and possibly with each other?

Or as in the case of Spooner and Hirst (perhaps) do relationships rely on past histories and occurrences? However, how accurate are these past events once they are past? People often remember events more fondly when looking back on them, and even forget other events as time passes. This is contradictory to Hirst's statement of how memory "never changes, never grows old". Yet Hirst also states that his memories are more real than his present, thus asking once again what indeed is real? However, is it important what is actual, real, or even true? Do these things change from person to person and if so do they really matter at all? Is it absolute truth that people glean from conversation or is it the relative truth that is important?

*No Man's Land* left me with a feeling of confusion and the voice of a little child asking "why" repeatedly in my mind. I found myself asking why is any of this important? It is good to know, but I think these are issues that most people know about. Everyone has chuckled when someone said something that could be misconstrued as inappropriate. People often struggle to

find the right words to convey the meaning they want when speaking. Many people argue over misunderstood phrases and words when the right meaning is not heard. What is it that makes this play important is another answerless question I find myself asking.

-Dawn Batts (Class of 2009 Interdepartmental Program Arts & Sciences)

The performance of Harold Pinter's play *No Man's Land* at the Duke of York Theatre was incredible. The actors' masterful rendition of Pinter's already remarkable script invited us into the sensitive, violent, tantalizing, and disturbing world of the human psyche as a construct (and prisoner) of language.

What first struck me while watching the play was the set itself, which constantly made us aware of a sense of dislocation. The stage was rigged to tilt slightly toward the audience, giving the impression of their world seeping out to (and at) us. The tilt also emphasized the feeling of drunkenness that was a prominent component throughout the play and made us the audience feel slightly drunk as well. The stage was luxurious, but also very notably sparse. The only furniture in the room was a small table, a leather armchair, and an overwhelmingly well-stocked bar. The only decorations in the room were artifacts that gave an air of Hirst being well-traveled: a Viking helmet, a Buddhist lamp, a strange mug, an African mask. However, given that the play itself is about the existence or lack of existence of the world as being contingent upon only our own imaginations, one must keep in mind that these artifacts are merely material objects. Though they seem to represent experiences such as travel, there is no way for us to know whether this travel actually took place; they could be placed there to create an illusion of worldliness to guests coming into the house. Even that answer could well be too simplistic; perhaps the objects are meant to create a *reality* for Hirst himself.

The actors Michael Gambon (Hirst) and David Bradley (Spooner) were fantastic at maintaining the humor and moments of vivid realism inherent in Pinter's script while still assaulting us with metaphysical implications about the very nature of the self. The interplay between the two actors was perfect, in my opinion: Bradley's silly, smiling, meandering Spooner contrasted with Gambon's reticent, nearly senile Hirst who perpetually drowns himself in alcohol. Later the two complement each other perfectly yet again when Spooner stands silent (for once) with his glass of breakfast champagne and Hirst "actually skips across the stage like a dancing porpoise" (a description I'm fond of from one reviewer) and chats it up with Spooner as if he's an old friend from Oxford.

One of the most compelling quotes in the play for comes from Spooner's first monologue: "My only security, you see, my true comfort and solace, rests in the confirmation that I elicit from people of all kinds a common and constant level of indifference. It assures me I am as I think myself to be; that I am fixed, concrete." Spooner, along with each of the other characters, is constantly asserting what he is and isn't to assure himself that he is "as he thinks himself to be," even if this identity constantly changes throughout the play. All we really have is the universe inside our heads and nothing else actually exists outside of our imagination; the world is only what we make of it.

This idea is reinforced by the huge ceiling-to-floor window on the side of the stage that is covered by blinds. Hirst goes to this window and peeps out at the "outside world," covering his eyes as if he is terrified of what he is about to see...as if what he will see will not support the idea of the world and the identity he has constructed for himself and will confirm his worst fears. He reels back as if struck when he sees outside the window and is reduced to crawling across the stage, desperately touching his furniture as if to assure himself that it is "real" or solid, until he

eventually crawls out the door on the other side of the stage. Later, when it is morning, the window comes into play again. The manservant Briggs opens the window to fill the room with light which, after the invariable darkness of the previous act, literally blinds the audience for a moment. This once again forces us to experience the essential components of the play's subject matter and contributes to the feeling that what is being enacted on stage applies directly to each of us on a very personal level. Hirst demands to close the blinds so that it will be night; it doesn't matter that it is morning outside because their world is contained within the isolated "no man's land" of their room. The world is, again, *only* what we make of it.

However, this world is always constrained by language, because we think of the world only in terms of the language we speak. If there is no word for something, it cannot exist. If one asserts something enough and begins to believe it, it becomes truth. One can turn the day into night just by declaring that it is night. Each character goes on and on in elaborate speeches, asserting who and what they believe themselves to be. In Spooner's final speech, we find a man who claimed to crave indifference to be begging for the very opposite, desperately trying to define and redefine himself to fit what he thinks others want him to be. The words themselves become twisted and convoluted in the final scene as Hirst says, "Let's change the subject." What is the subject? Once you change the subject, you get an entirely different sentence, a different meaning, and a different reality. (I would love to go on and on about this in an extensive essay, but this is only a journal entry...)

-Beverly Ferguson (Class of 2009 Eastman/English)

In war, no man's land is the disputed space between enemy lines. It is a shell-shocked wasteland, where no one belongs. Indeed, Erich Maria Remarque's moving World War One

novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* emphasizes that point. The narrator, Paul Bäumer, having lost his sense of direction in no man's land, sits waiting in a trench. Time drags on indefinitely as he watches the Frenchman he has killed slowly die. The tortured screams of dying horses ringing across the battlefield give Paul a feeling of anguish he can never fully extinguish. In the madness of no man's land, there is no hope of finding time, space, language, reason, or anything meaningful.

Harold Pinter's aptly titled play *No Man's Land* follows the aimless conversations between Hirst, his houseguest Spooner, and his manservants Briggs and Foster over drinks. Their musings—ranging from the confused to the aggressive—inadvertently question the nature of time, language, and reality. Despite the title, allusions to the chaos of war are absent from the play. Instead it examines the implications of a life without climax in no man's land. The play has no clearly discernible plot and its dramatic structure looks more like a flat road than a pyramid. It also lacks a satisfying denouement; instead of concluding the play, Pinter makes it clear that the Hirst will continue his tedious life ad infinitum. After the subject changes—for the last time—the conversation becomes circular, with no clear end in sight, until Hirst makes a toast and swallows the whole drunken situation.

*No Man's Land* is a very disorienting play. It opens with a literal chord of dissonance, which inspires an unsettling feeling that is never fully resolved. This discomfort is only exacerbated by the play itself. Every time that the play begins to develop a promising storyline, it is abruptly cut off. At one point, Spooner starts to regale us with a tale about a long-forgotten encounter with royalty in a tavern, but he is interrupted and loses his train of thought. Later, Hirst enthusiastically appears to recognize Spooner as an old college rival, but this encounter again ultimately ends in confusion, with Hirst questioning Spooner's identity and presence. The play

repeatedly sounds a leading tone to build tension, but refuses to follow through with a satisfying resolution.

The sense of disorientation was only compounded by the enormous quantities of alcohol consumed. A massive, central bar, fully stocked with all varieties of liquor, dominates the set. Lights behind the bar cast the distorted shadows of the booze bottles over everything, indicating alcohol's pervasive presence. For stretches of the first act—and to comedic effect—Hirst silently poured himself glass after glass of alcohol. Hirst, at one point, even claims to have only hired Foster and Briggs because he needed people to pour his drinks. Meanwhile, Spooner is not shy. During the opening scene, in which Spooner dominates the conversation, he helps himself to his fair share of his host's liquor. At breakfast the next morning he experiences no shame in cracking open a fresh bottle of champagne so early in the day.

Both Spooner and Hirst claim to be poets, and Spooner even occasionally speaks in rhyme. However, at a loss for words, he is forced to fill in the end of his first rhyme with nonsense syllables, highlighting the futility of language. Even in an ideal situation, poetry—an attempt to trick words into attaining a meaning—is difficult to comprehend. Spooner notes that the only ones left who translate verse nowadays are the Romanians. But where does that leave those of us who don't speak Romanian?

Spooner dragged out his speeches with long pauses. By the time he had concluded a sentence, I had forgotten where he had started. Thus, even simple statements became convoluted messes and language began to lose its meaning. Rather than understanding what he said, I often focused on the individual words in his dialogue, until their very idea became ludicrous. Hirst certainly didn't understand Spooner's words. Michael Gambon played the role brilliantly: he

stared blankly into the audience, avoiding any eye contact with his guest. He refused to reply to Spooner's dialogue, giving no indication that he was even remotely interested.

The play distorts the sense of time. Following the interlude, the massive window in the sets background has its curtains drawn. With no view to the outside world, we are as in the dark to the time of day as Spooner who has only just woken up. When the curtains are opened, the window lets in a harsh light, illuminating the audience and revealing that it is morning. The sudden brightness made it painful to even squint at the stage. Being still jetlagged myself, I could sympathize fully with Spooner's disorientation. Hirst also plays with the idea of time. Having woken up sometime in the middle of the night, he takes a drink, noting it as the "first of the day." Had a new day begun simply because he has taken a nap?

*No Man's Land* demands analysis. The audience is expected to take an active role in dissecting the plot in an effort to understand it. Without putting the necessary thought into the production, an audience member would surely find himself at a loss for what he had seen. However, attempts to analyze the plot, while satisfying and occasionally insightful, can quickly become as disorienting as the play itself.

-Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012 Chemistry)

***War Horse* (2008). Dir. Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris. Olivier Theatre**

Bluntly, I do not see how any of the plays we have yet to see can top *War Horse* in my esteem. This show was fantastic to me in almost every way, from the set to the plot to the acting. It moved me the way I think theatre should be able to move its audience, and the attention to detail in every part of the production made it a truly masterful work. I wish I had been able to

see its last run so that I could note the differences. From what I'm told it was even more elaborate then, but I don't see that there could be many ways to improve on what I saw.

The first striking element of the play was the set. The Olivier Theatre was a wonderful place to stage this, and not only because its rotating lift allowed for various interesting maneuvers. The ambiance of the theatre contributed to the feeling of the production. I immediately noticed a white projection screen that looked like a tear as the only real piece of set obviously present. I thought it interesting that we later learned that the screen was indeed supposed to look like a tear, hearkening back to the page Albert tore out of the officer's sketchbook.

The projections on this screen added a lot to the performance. They were often drawings in black and white, or with minimal color. One that struck me occurred during one of the war scenes, where red color bloomed on a nearly colorless background. Other times, the projections were diagrams or maps with labels of different areas; or even small animations. At one point, the screen was used to indicate the growth and education of Joey – Albert was seen on the large puppet in the back of the stage, riding in place while a projection showed a sketch of a horse and rider that began to move, galloping. The simplicity of these sketches fit in well, in my opinion, not only because they called to mind the artist officer who took Joey, but because they paralleled the simplicity of love that the story was meant to convey. A sense of the rustic pervaded them, matching the setting and plot just as the costumes and props did.

Of course, the most impressive part of the play for me was the puppetry. When Joey appeared onstage for the first time I was shocked. I knew that the puppets would be fantastic, but somehow didn't expect them to be so real. I had a horse named Phoenix for years; I knew him ever since he was a foal and through his training and growth. I know how horses move and



act. When the young puppet of Joey appeared, I knew he was a puppet but my brain said “horse”. Each movement was incredibly precise. To show interest, I noticed the puppeteers not only making the horse breathe harder, but moving the head, perking the ears and lifting the tail. The body language was so detailed and accurate that I imagine a real horse might be confused by the puppet's presence! I enjoyed the puppet designers' choice to leave unjointed legs on the young version of Joey, because it lent a sense of instability to the gait that is definitely present in how very young horses move. It didn't bother me that the puppeteers were visible – their presence was pretty easily ignored; and I found myself lost in the movements of their work.

Another scene that enchanted me was one of the first moments of battle. All the horses lined up together made a hugely powerful picture. Six gigantic puppets with men astride all of them, standing and then galloping together, was a shock. I thought the officer's fall from Joey was extremely well done. It is another example of the unimportance of the presence of certain “helping hands” onstage. Like the puppeteers, the men who came to lift and turn the officer through the air and lay him on the floor for his death did not bother me. In this way I almost look at *War Horse* as a performance art piece. Instead of trying for complete realism, they focus more on giving the idea of the moment. The emphasis is not only on conveying what is occurring in the plot, but how any given second of that plot might have felt for the characters. The way the men moved the officer slowly through the air gave me a feeling of helplessness – something terrible was happening very slowly, and yet there was no way to help; only more time to think about the terrible event even as it occurred.

Perhaps in this way *War Horse* was more realistic than some of the other, more “normal” plays we have seen. Although others have more straightforward events, and might look more real on the surface, the fact that this play touched so deeply to the emotions is to me very

significant. The level of catharsis the actors achieved with the audience was spectacular. In my opinion, any theatrical performance that can so affect the mind; that can make us feel something so real; is of a different type of realism and is truly great theatre.

- Christine Rose (Class of 2011 Biology)

**David Hare. *Gethsemane* (2008). Dir. Howard Davies. Cottesloe Theatre**

One of the most striking elements of the National Theatre's production of *Gethsemane* was the set design. All three walls of the set were a fairly uniform white paneling made to be used as projection screens. What I found fabulous was that the actors' movements never cast shadows on these projections, whatever they might be. Different scenes were projected onto the backgrounds, and during scene changes a moving cityscape was shown. This lent the production an urban feel that was very important to the mood of the plot. The characters were all deeply connected with the city. Most were politicians; all were at least related to politicians in some way, and such figures are by nature of their job tied to an urban lifestyle.

All *Gethsemane*'s characters were tied together in some way, and the fact that these connections were not readily apparent made the play all the more intriguing. Suzette, daughter of Meredith, is also student to Lori, who is wife to Mike, who works for Otto. The interesting thing was how the interactions between these characters unfolded, and how they changed or did not change throughout the show. For example, at first Meredith disdains Lori because Suzette admires her although she taught at a public school. Later though, Meredith needs Lori's help with Suzette and their relationship develops slightly. In contrast, Suzette's relationships with other characters remain pretty consistently static throughout. She continues to admire Lori and disdains her mother. From the opposite angle, Meredith's view towards Suzette changes

little – she sees her from beginning to end as a liability to be contained; an ungrateful problem that she ignores as much as possible. She never gives Suzette a straight answer about when she will be able to do anything for her; whether it be going out to dinner or paying for the hotel she wished her daughter to hide in for the preservation of her mother's political career. All of this translates into symptoms of the greater disease of their connection: Suzette gets no support or real love from the woman who should have been most relied upon to supply them.

I thought the actress that portrayed Suzette in this production was very successful in conveying the feelings of her character. Her body language was very expressive, and her tone was varied enough to be interesting without distracting. At points it almost seemed as if she were playing a parody of the stereotypical, angst-ridden teen; using mocking tones and sighs. This wasn't ever annoying, though, because of the ways she contrasted this device with very real emotion. The scene between Lori and Suzette in which Suzette reveals that she slept with four men in one night is a perfect example of this. The actress uses this stereotype like a mask, usually using it to hide the real emotions of her character but for this occasion allowing them free reign. When she finally leans into Lori's shoulder, the revelation reaches completion and the audience feels how helpless, afraid, regretful, angry and needful Suzette really is.

For this reason, I connected most with Suzette's character, even though she had fewer lines than many and none of the solitary monologues that almost all of the other actors performed. These seemed to me to be an extra way for the author to emphasize the views he was trying to convey throughout the rest of the play. The monologues generally centered on societal problems – Monique talks about the double standards of religion; Lori speaks on the blind following of texts; and Otto's assistant talks of stereotypes. I think the staging of these monologues was very effective. They generally occurred between scenes, which the director

used to advantage as a way to get the speaker completely alone on set. Placing the other actors' exits just before the scene change left the speaker a solitary character. This was an impactful method because not only did it bring the audience's complete focus on the actor in question, but it gave a sense of unreality to the moment. The character seemed to be out of time; out of the play; speaking directly to the audience. It almost seemed as if the actors performing these parts of the play were breaking the fourth wall, though they never specifically acknowledged this.

Overall the movements of the actors seemed very well staged and helpful to the advancement of the plot and the mood of the play. One scene that stuck out in my mind was between Monique, Lori and the journalist. While discussing their situation over the bar, a clear power struggle is taking place. What is interesting is that the journalist, seated stage right, seems to be in control at first. When Lori takes charge, she moves around the bar from the stage left side to the place where the journalist has been sitting. Not only that, but she exchanges their drinks' positions. These movements were a clear symbol of the change in power positions between the characters at this point.

*Gethsemane* was a great production simply because of its social commentary and the overarching message it conveyed. What made it truly enjoyable was the creative methods it used in the conveyance. From a set of walls made into projection screens to the placement of monologues to simple good casting, I thoroughly enjoyed this production.

- Christine Rose (Class of 2011 Biology)

I had high hopes for *Gethsemane* written by David Hare and directed by Howard Davies from the minute the first words were spoken. This is probably because I was brought up in a nonreligious household and have always felt, as Lori Drysdale does, that I am a person “without

a book.” Beyond the opening, I enjoyed all the ideas and issues presented in this play because I found most of them highly relatable. Excluding of course, the strong message related specifically to English politics, which I wasn’t able to associate with my life experiences when I was watching the play because I was unfamiliar with the details. Once we talked about the Labour party and English politics in class, however, I was better able to understand the broader meaning. In fact, I found that while I was able to immediately relate to most of the ideas and issues presented in *Gethsemane*, it was not until I pondered them after the play that I was able to fully appreciate the depth of their significance. For instance, you would think that being the title of the play the idea of having a “night of doubt” or a Gethsemane would clearly apply to all the characters, but I only associated it with Lori Drysdale, played by Nicola Walker, when I was watching a play. This is because she is the only character in the play who acknowledges the idea at all. But even she gets it all wrong, as we learn at the end of the play when she is told by Suzette Guest, played by Jessica Raine, that having a Gethsemane is not only having a night of doubt, but proceeding in the same direction despite that doubt. This definition is what I have used to reassess the entire play, which is a fairly obvious approach now since it is the title of the play, but was not so for me during the play. All the characters in this play are defined by what they do and their paths in life have been carved out according to their profession. Each character is also unsure of their path and dwell on how they got there. This is most clearly shown by Geoff Benzine, played by Adam James, who is former scholar turned reporter. He recounts his journey in torment, indicating that he feels he has thrown away a career of intellect for a less-satisfying, but more profitable, career in gossip monger. Most importantly, Geoff feels as though the most despicable thing about his life is that he let the path he was leading take him away without stopping to think about where he really was going, without a night of doubt to enable

him to reassess the situation. Just like Geoff, the rest of the characters, excluding Lori, have lead themselves blindly down their path without stopping to consider their doubt. They are miserable because they are unable to let go of their idealistic plans for their lives and accept reality. Meredith Grace, played by Tamsin Greig, portrays this phenomenon best with her line, “once it was possible to do good [in politics] by being good. / Now the only way to do good is by being clever.” While Meredith does address her idealistic idea of politics with this line, it is clear by her constant struggle with having to be “clever” in her day to day interactions as a politician that she has not accepted the reality she has presented. In my opinion, this play is trying to make the point that in order to really accept your life as it is and be really committed to the path that it is taking you on, one must have a period a doubt which stops everything that one is doing in order to look at the situation with a new perspective; one must have a Gethsemane in order to be happy with the path which one is leading. What I find to be important is that the ending result is the same—whether one has a Gethsemane or not, one stays on the same path. The crucial difference however, it is only by having doubt that one is able to know it is the right path for them. I was sure that at the end of the play that Lori realized that music is the right medium through which to express herself, she continued on her original path. The other characters, such as Geoff and Meredith, also continue to follow the same path but do so without perspective and in unhappiness because they have not had a Gethsemane.

-Kristine Wadowsky (Class of 2009 English/Biological Sciences: Molecular Genetics)

**William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1601). Dir. Gregory Doran. Novello Theatre**

Prior to seeing the Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of *Hamlet*, I had read the play, but never seen it performed. Director Gregory Doran shaped the production to make it

exciting, fast moving, yet thought provoking. Additionally, he directed the actors in a way that made me rethink their characters.

I thought that the use of the mirrors that covered the entire upstage wall was a brilliant scenic decision, for it connected to themes of the play, and contributed to the momentum of the production. To me, the mirror represented Hamlet's conflict of cowardly inability to act versus rash decisions. Mirrors represent self reflection, which Hamlet practices to an extreme extent at the beginning of the play and grows frustrated with. In this production, when Hamlet kills Polonius, he shatters the mirror, which signifies his transition from reflective to active. The mirror also allowed the audience members to see different scenes from different angles, explicating the way in which many of the evidence in the plot can be interpreted differently by each characters onstage, which is one of the reasons that we are led to tragedy at the end. The mirrors were also extremely effective in the opening scene for they established a great sense of chaos when the flashlights bounced off them. This not only drew in the audience, but also established the out-of-control state of Denmark.

I appreciated how Doran directed the actors to speak in a natural manner, and at a tempo that kept a forward momentum and made for a fast moving production. It surprised me that one critic thought that the words had been too studied, because in my opinion they did not feel studied at all, but rather rendered genuinely and naturally. Specifically, nearly all of soliloquies felt shorter and more natural than I thought that they would come across as from reading the text.

To me, Doran directed the production so that physical stagnation represented control over ones emotions and actions. When the characters began to lose emotional control, they would break out of stagnation, simultaneously losing control of their bodies, which eventually led to physical violence and confrontation. It felt as though the high society of Denmark expected the

characters to behave in a proper and unexpressive manner, but as the play continued, the characters that lead the country cannot hold up this decorum, as they cannot hold up the country. I found this physicality especially evident in Hamlet, Laertes, and Claudius. On the other hand, Ophelia never stood still. She always moved dynamically around the stage, not afraid to even lie down while talking to Hamlet, which I interpreted as having a lack of control over her feelings for him, despite what he family warnings from her family.

When reading the text, I was never quite sure what to make of the character of Hamlet. Was he cowardly? Brave? Insane? From Edward Bennet's performance I concluded that Hamlet was not insane, but rather intelligent, angered and overall sympathetic. I most enjoyed watching Edward Bennet when he was interacting with other characters, because in many scenes where I thought that Hamlet would come off as insane, Bennet's delivery made Hamlet come off as witty and clever. As a result, I concluded that Hamlet was driven to his actions not out of insanity, but out of anger and grief for his father's death. Bennet excellently established this characterization in both his first soliloquy and the "to be or not to be" soliloquy. In both, he demonstrated Hamlet's desire to hold himself together, but being physically crippled by anger. He began standing still, and speaking calmly, taking more time with the rhetoric than I expected. Eventually, he could not suppress his anger and would lose control of his voice and physicality. Then, he would try to regain control over himself, only to lose it again. Another example of this idea took place in the "get thee to a nunnery" scene with Ophelia. Bennet particularly moved me, for there was one moment in particular when he intently looked Ophelia in the eyes and affectionately kissed her forehead before becoming intensely abusive. To me, this change in physicality reflected how Hamlet felt that he could no longer properly interact with people and hold a healthy relationship.



Patrick Stewart forced me to rethink Claudius. From the text, I viewed Claudius to be more domineering, but Stewart played him as a brand new king, who was still unsure of how to use this power that he had been coveting. For example, in his first scene, instead of confidently and authoritatively delivering the soliloquy, he appeared to be trying to work the room, cracking jokes in an effort to get his subjects on his side. Sometimes he was affective and solicited reactions from them and other times he was not as effective, soliciting uncomfortable silence. I appreciated that Doran did not stage the scene to elevate Claudius from his subjects, or have him wear a crown. Additionally, Stewart comported himself with a slightly hunched over stance, always seeming to have his eyes slightly directed towards the ground, which demonstrated a lack of confidence. He receptively played off both Polonius and Gertrude, which gave me the impression that he was relying on both of them for ideas on how to lead the country. Only when he came to dramatic decisions such as expelling Hamlet to England, or staging to duel did he seem to derive power and confidence in his abilities as king. In particular, his confession soliloquy was even more powerful than I expected it to be, because the audience could so clearly see why he might be driven to guilt, keeping the character from becoming a one dimensional villain. Stewart's actions made the character more sympathetic than I expected him to be, though not too sympathetic that I questioned which character's side that I was on.

I also rethought the character of Polonius, for I was surprised how much I enjoyed watching him. Although Polonius sneakily oversteps his boundaries, Oliver Ford Davies played him as being more caring than I expected the character to be. Even though he has the foible of being overly suspicious, I sensed how it stems from genuine care for his country and his family, not any kind of desire to gain power. Davies rendered him in a way that made him feel like an eccentric grandfather figure, which added a greater sense of tragedy to his death, for I could feel

his quirky presence missing for the remainder of the play.

The only performer that I took issue with was Mariah Gale as Ophelia. I enjoyed her in the first act, as she made the character livelier than I expected, but I disagreed with her interpretation of the scene where Ophelia becomes insane. Gale came across as more restrained than I would have liked to see. I felt as though she acted as a teenager acting out against authority rather than someone driven to madness.

- Stephanie Schwartz (Class of 2011 English)

***Zorro, the Musical* (2008). Dir. Christopher Renshaw. Garrick Theatre**

I absolutely loved this production. Renshaw took every audience member on an adventure and told a story based around cultural issues and fused it with elaborate sets, choreography, magic tricks, and costumes to create a highly entertaining musical based around important issues, not fluff. It was a legendary tale of culture clash transformed into an entertaining spectacle, and the infusion of Spanish culture throughout the show is what made the show so infectious.

There were three main aspects of the show which really increased the cultural atmosphere of the show, taking you away from a playhouse in London and pulling you into the setting; the mariachi guitar player, the pueblo set, and the musical asides of the Gypsy's essentially whaling in harmony. The interesting thing about the mariachi player was how prominently he was portrayed. They could have just as easily had the music and had him play in the pit, but dressing him in Gypsy garb and having him sit on a ledge and play with a small spotlight worked not only set the mood, but to give a sense of the omnipresence of the Gypsies in the show. This omnipotence became a theme later as the Gypsies came out of the woodwork almost like Robin

Hood's men to save the day. It was also an interesting theme to me as Diego himself was the dual identity of Zorro and a common Gypsy. When he was Diego though, his secret identity of Zorro was in constant balance, and visa versa. The set also worked well because it gave a sense of a place larger than that which the audience got to see. The buildings and walls were cheated out a little bit, which made them seem like just the beginning of a small village, and the multi tier set with several ladders gave it a sense of upward height too, as though the ladder kept going up through the roof into someone else's house in the pueblo. It prevented things from being stagnant, and the whole play proved to show that Spanish culture is anything but stale. The Gypsy chorus, which opened the second act, worked primarily to show the passion of the Gypsies. This was an interesting addition to the play, as it was a full four or five minute scene that added nothing to further the plot, but solely to portray the strife of the Gypsy people and the beauty in the primal way they express their emotions. Primal, in this, sense is not to say primitive or have any negative connotation, but rather the Gypsies are shown as the underdog heroes throughout the show, and their primal song is beautiful and a part of their in-your-face culture. The fact that the director would take a full scene just to show off this chorus is really indicative of the importance of their culture in this show.

Contrasting the serious issues of the story of death, revenge, and culture class, were high-tech and highly orchestrated spectacles. This, I think was really just for the pure entertainment of the audience, but also worked to reflect the characters. From the audience's viewpoint, we were highly entertained and laughed, but also made attachments to the characters and truly cared when things happened, i.e. Inez's death was very powerful because she was made such a likeable and inspirational character. The highly choreographed Gypsy songs and dances reflected the Gypsy way of life and also showed Inez as a powerful and confident woman. Similarly, all of

the stage magic, rope swinging, and fancy sword fights used for the Zorro character were very fun to watch, but furthermore, they created a huge juxtaposition between Diego as Diego and Diego as Zorro. Zorro became more than just a man. Rather, he was an entire entity in and of himself, representing the pride and courage of those being oppressed, thus the stage magic and pyrotechnics allowing him to disappear, and the huge sword fights where he takes down 10 men made him larger than life. Overall, I really loved this show. I believe the director was trying to create an experience where your eyes go wide at the fantastic exhibition on stage, while making you care about the characters. For me, as an audience member, this was fully realized.

-Mark Sobel (Class of 2010 Psychology)

*Zorro* explores gypsy culture and Spanish culture in a very light hearted and glorified light. The greatest achievement of this production is the music and dancing that puts the audience in a good mood. The production gives a nod at the culture of flamenco dancing by including professional flamenco dancers. The band was also very impressive with their talents and spirit with the music. Interestingly, the musicians were off stage the entire show. In this type of show, they could have been present in view of the audience. Music is normally a large part of Spanish culture and would easily fit with the tone on stage. Here, however, we do not have musicians functioning also as actors. This makes the focus of the show more on the story itself and does not rely on essentially showing the guts of the show on stage. The music here is meant to be a supplement rather than a focus. The storytelling narrative also gives us a glimpse of Spanish culture. We see the importance of passing tales along to younger generations, the glorification of men's past, dance pervading social and group gatherings, celebration through dance and song,

and both men and women take part in these activities. The opening of the show set this theme of passing culture and story along.

This version of *Zorro* has elements of a classic love story, but is unique in many ways. Boy and girl are pulled apart by circumstances; Diego leave school to join a life of drinking and fun. He longs to be back with Luisa but wants to protect her from the world as it is. The love interest is an innocent pretty girl and is longed for despite the entrance of another woman in Diego's life. Diego disguises himself and re-enters Luisa's life as a better version of himself. Diego ultimately changes the gypsies, grows as a person himself, and introduces Luisa to a culture apart from what she knew. As in any feel-good musical, the boy and girl end up together in a happy ending.

The third most developed character in this play is the gypsy woman. Her death does not fit with the tone of "feel-good musical". However, in many respects it is necessary for the story. She is the leader and a strong person in Diego's life when he is exploring his freedom from his previous life. We see her as a very sexual woman who wants Diego for herself, but she is also a voice of reason and wants to protect her gypsy family. When she is killed, Diego no longer has to choose between women, making his choice inevitable and without further obstacle. Her death also adds some harsh reality the can occur in any community in the midst of conflict.

On the stage itself, we have a multi-tiered set. Ladders set farther forward allow the actors to come out toward the audience. The tiers and ladders allow for the action to occur on the floor or above it. In scenes with women singing and dancing, having them on different levels makes them seem more like a force of women. Spread out vertically and horizontally, they seem more numerous and represent a large group of people. The doorways and different levels creates a sense of a town with many houses. Varying depths of the stage show us we are in either a town

street or square. The different levels also allow for Diego to hide and watch some of the action in the town.

One of the interesting parts of the sets was utilized for a duet between Diego and Luisa. She was inside the house, while he was on the roof. The slant of the ceiling allows for a diagonal separation of the two domains. Different lighting also added to the creation of two separate spaces; she was lit by candle light, while he by bluish moonlight. This duet has many visual opposites: man/woman, above/below, moon/candle, outside/inside, black cape/white dress, and daring/innocent.

Magic on stage is a wonderful addition to this musical and creates a connection between the two lives of Diego. We all love magic tricks and big productions. We love seeing people perform tricks for us that are hard to figure out. Magic is also a form of art and fits with this production of dance and song of culture and love. The use of it by Diego and Zorro bring together two personalities which are intentionally rather different. This story of *Zorro* is really a fun show that is placed in a clashing of cultures but overall makes what could be a sad story into one with a happy ending.

-Sarah Stelma (Class of 2009 Biological Sciences: Neuroscience)

***Billy Elliot the Musical.* Dir. Stephen Daldry. Victoria Palace Theatre**

*Billy Elliot* tells the story of a talented young boy's struggle to prove himself as a ballet dancer, despite the familial and social obstacles standing the way of his dreams. Brad Wilson, who played the demanding lead role of Billy, is a mere twelve years old. His incredible acrobatic feats and mastery of ballet and tap made it difficult to believe that he was still just a child. *Billy Elliot*, though it features many young actors, is not a children's play; the complex social and

political issues it discusses are not suited to a young audience. Billy, having lost his mother and growing up in a poor, northern English mining town, has given up much of his childhood. To achieve his mighty ambitions and become a professional dancer, he must sacrifice the rest of it.

The musical features an extraordinary amount of profanity. However, it serves an important purpose, beyond sounding brilliantly funny coming from the mouths of British youngsters. The boys' use of obscenities symbolizes a premature loss of innocence. Growing up in a coal town, the young boys are all invariably expected, like their fathers and grandfathers before them, to become miners. As such, boys begin adopting the salty language of the miners, while they themselves are yet minors.

Mining is an omnipresent part of their lives, and when the miners go on strike to protest Margaret Thatcher's privatization of the coal industry, it affects the children as much as anyone else. In the stunning dance number "Solidarity", the adult dancers interweave with the children practicing ballet. The children even join in and sing some of the lyrics. The idea of union solidarity is to band together as a group to increase bargaining power. If any scabs break a union's strike, the union loses a powerful bargaining chip. Thus there is an enormous pressure on everyone to conform to the union ideology, which extends even to the children. Billy's brother becomes so absorbed in the union cause that he literally jumps on his father to prevent him from breaking the strike. Because these adult political issues are so central to their family's welfare, even the children taken a stance have learned to abhor scabs.

Billy, however, has been thrust into adulthood more suddenly than any of his peers. Having lost his mum at a young age, he grew up in a male dominated household with his father, brother, and grandmother. Because he was bullied at school, his father enrolls Billy in a boxing class, where he is surrounded by boys. Billy's inclination towards ballet is an understandable attempt to

regain the femininity absent from his life. Indeed, his two maternal figures—his grandmother and the dance teacher, Mrs. Wilkinson—both encourage Billy to follow his heart and dance. To become a dancer, however, requires enormous dedication, and Billy would be forced to sacrifice the rest of his youth. He acknowledges and accepts this: “I don’t want a childhood. I want to be a ballet dancer.” To Billy, dancing is more than a childish hobby; it is a lifestyle. During “Swan Lake” Billy is shown dancing with his older self, foreshadowing that this dedication to dancing will last his whole life.

Following the interval, the show briefly becomes a pantomime, juxtaposing adult themes in a medium traditionally aimed at children. As in *Cinderella*, the actors broke character to address the audience. When they cried out “Oh no, you don’t!” the adults, trained since early childhood, dutifully responded “Oh yes, we will!” There were even anachronistic pop culture references to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. The pantomime, although reminiscent of childhood, remained as overtly political and adult as the rest of the play. A giant, terrifying Margaret Thatcher puppet loomed over the pantomime, symbolizing the miner’s perpetual fears of losing their jobs, even during a Christmas celebration. The children even join in to insult Maggie Thatcher, calling their prime minister a “wanker.”

-Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012 Chemistry)

**Joe Orton, *Loot* (1966). Dir. Sean Holmes. Tricycle Theatre**

Throughout Joe Orton’s *Loot* characters constantly try to withhold information and deceive each other. This issue of transparency is directly evident in the set. It is filled with various nooks in which to hide things: the coffin, a dresser, and a sheet. These crevices serve as apt places to stash both a recently deceased corpse, and the loot from a bank heist. As a black



comedy, *Loot*'s ultimate goal is to eliminate deception and reveal to the audience unspoken societal taboos, and it does so shamelessly. The play publicly mocks Catholicism, the police, and the institution of marriage, among other topics.

The Catholic son, Hal is dressed neatly in a suit, and his hair is well kempt. This tidy outward appearance doesn't tell the whole story though; he has recently robbed a bank. Hal's ability to deceive stops there, however, as his religion forbids him to lie. This one strict moral guideline stinks horribly of hypocrisy. The Catholic Church forbids him from the minor crime of telling a lie, but he feels no qualms about robbing a bank or desecrating his dead mother's corpse. Indeed, Hal is punished for neither of these serious sins, but his adherence to the truth earns him an intense five-minute display of police brutality. Hal's father, also a devout Catholic, is the most innocent member of the cast. He has a naïve respect for authority, doesn't break the law, and even refuses to marry his nurse Fay when he learns she is a murderer. For this virtuous behavior, however, he is sent to jail by the corrupted Inspector Truscott. *Loot* depicts a world devoid of justice where characters are punished for acting decently and rewarded for their sins.

Inspector Truscott makes a mockery of the London police system. He initially hides his identity, disguising himself as a member of the water board in order to find suspects for the recent bank robbery. His presence forces Hal and his accomplice, who works at the funeral home, Dennis to stash the money in Hal's mother's coffin, initiating a web of deceit, which only grows more complicated. When Truscott, suspicious of Hal, doesn't receive the answers he wants, he assaults him. Truscott's one-sided attack on Hal becomes increasingly brutal as the fight scene progresses. In one instance, Truscott actually does perform legitimate police work and arrests the murderous nurse, but she is freed on a technicality, exposing flaws of the legal

system. Later, when Truscott is offered a bribe in exchange for his assistance, he agrees immediately; he is simply a corrupt police officer who acts as if he is above the law.

Marriage is also regarded as a laughable concept by *Loot*. Even the supposedly noble widower plans to run off with Fay before having a chance to pay his deceased wife her due respects. Fay has had eight marriages in as many years. She marries men not because she loves them, but so she can murder them and claim their inheritance. Fay agrees to marry Dennis only after he reveals that he has stolen a substantial sum of money. However, her engagement does not inhibit her from groping Hal in the play's uncomfortably awkward closing scene.

-Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012 Chemistry)

The black comedy *Loot* was one of the more humorous shows we saw over the trip, but in a unique way. Black comedies in general take a “nothing sacred” sort of approach to humor, and *Loot* was not an exception here. The show took murder, lies, government corruption, theft and death and made all comedic. The main strength this performance relied on in pulling this off was its good casting and development of the characters. To some extent, all were stereotypical—a conniving, wealth-obsessed wife/widow; a clueless old man; a hardball detective. While these roles could have been stale, the actors really brought their characters to life. Many of them developed certain small tics that seemed to fit very well; for example the son's perpetual need to smooth his hair with a comb, particularly when talking about wrongdoing or his religion. All of the people onstage were somewhat caricatured, but this wasn't bothersome because of the type of show. In places it almost seemed like a slapstick comedy, so choices like the detective's grim, interrogative voice didn't grate on the audience.

The costumes played into this stereotyping in many ways. The nurse, married several times after killing her husbands and seducing new ones, wears short dresses all the time, and often heels, both of which emphasize her sexuality. The young robber bound by his religion is also physically bound by his clothing – tight pants, a constricting buttoned jacket over a turtleneck that sometimes appears to be choking him.

This costuming choice played in nicely to the overall commentary on religion, particularly Catholicism, heavily present throughout the show. This commentary seemed mostly focused on emphasizing contradictions within the faith through contradictions in the show's characters. Even though the examples given through various jokes were exaggerations not actually part of the religion, the point still came through. For instance, the nurse quips that she could never euthanize someone because it is against her religion, but tacitly proposes murder as an alternative. One of the most central plot points revolves around such a contradiction. The widower's son can rob a bank with no problem to his conscience, but is completely unable to lie because it is a sin. Overall the characters seem to take what parts of their religion are convenient to them and overlook those that conflict; this instance of inability to lie being the one exception. Even the clearly homosexual relationship between the two male robbers is ignored, unless it is brought up in a context where one actor needs an excuse to berate the two.

The philosophy of observing their faith when convenient played out nicely with the theme of corruption brought in by the detective. He consistently lies to the other characters in whatever scene he is playing. He tells the widower he is from the water department; he tells his fellow police officer the old man is a bank robber trying to escape; he above all pretends not to be a detective with everyone until the final scenes. Although most of his actions, including these lies, are blatantly illegal, he suffers no consequence in the play. This detective is generally

willing to work in whatever way is most helpful to him, ignoring not only the law but also anything else that might be an obstacle. He delivered one of my favorite lines of the show when speaking about the “maxim of the [police] force”, advising to “Never search your own backyard; you might find what you’re looking for.”

*Loot* could have ended up being a completely silly and frivolous play, but its strong themes and good acting pulled it through. Both complemented each other – in a show with weaker material behind the script, semi-slapstick acting would have made the show a useless piece of theatre. Likewise, without this caricature-style acting, the mocking of such serious subjects as death and religion would have come off too seriously and eliminated any comedic aspects of the show. I thought *Loot* made good choices in this respect and very much enjoyed the performance.

- Christine Rose (Class of 2011 Biology)

***A Little Night Music* (1973). Dir. Trevor Nunn. Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.**

**Book by Hugh Wheeler, based on Ingmar Bergman’s *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955). Menier Chocolate Factory Theatre.**

This is one of my favorite musicals of all time. I've seen it three times before; once as a high school production and twice at Eastman. I used to think the Eastman production was phenomenal, but that's only because I had never seen a well-done professional version of the musical! This particular version knocked my socks off. The only things I didn't like (which I feel I should get out of the way now so I can focus on the play's positives) were the mottled mirrors as the backdrop of the set, the slightly shrieking, nasal quality of Anne's voice, and the inclusion of the song "Silly People" by Frid. The mirrors did provide the set with an "antique" atmosphere,

but I craved something more diverse. Maybe I was already mirrored-out by *Hamlet*. As for Anne's voice, I could tell that she has potential as a singer, so perhaps she was just too young for such a highly developed soprano part. And lastly, Frid's little solo. This was cut in most performances because, as director Hal Prince put it, "Nobody cares what Frid thinks!" Sondheim also agreed that "Frid was not important enough...to spend some four minutes with." I have to agree; although it was interesting hearing his song, I felt that because he had never had an important speaking part before it I honestly didn't care for his opinion on things. Sad but true. The actress who really stood out for me in this production was Hannah Wassingham as Desiree Armfeldt. Her voice, her stage presence, and her subtleties of demeanor all made for an amazing performance. Apparently this is one of the rare times when an actual musical theatre actress has been cast in the role, and I really appreciated it. Though she's no Judi Dench, she certainly has her own brand of flair. I also thought that Alexander Hanson as Fredrik Egerman was quite good as well; he lent a certain youthful glow to the performance, which I found ironic in a way because he's the oldest actor I've ever seen playing the role. But because of this slight spark of youth, I could really see why he wanted to marry such a young girl in the first place: he was young at heart and didn't want to lose any of his youthfulness to the midlife that encroached on him.

I also loved the staging of the "Greek" chorus. Unlike the Eastman production, in which they stayed more or less as a group slinking along under or to the side of the stage, this chorus was interpreted more as elements of the characters' psyches. For example, during the song "Remember," a female chorus member enters on the side of the stage where Desiree had been and a male chorus member enters where Fredrik had been, clearly delineating the interpretation of the director.

-Beverly Ferguson (Class of 2009 Eastman/English)

The Menier Chocolate Factory's production of *A Little Night Music* as directed by Trevor Nunn marks my third time seeing this musical, and I believe this production to be far superior to the other two versions I have seen, because Nunn defied many conventions that have become characteristic in productions of this musical.

It has been a recent trend to reduce the scale of Sondheim musicals. Hal Prince originally directed six of Sondheim's major shows on a large scale, but directors seem to recently be discovering that with many Sondheim musicals, if the audience can become more intimate with the characters, production becomes more powerful. This is particularly important with *A Little Night Music*, as it presents several sets of complicated relationships, and has many songs that delve into the character's psyche. The very structure of the Menier Chocolate Factory calls for a reduced set and more intimate staging. The entire audience sits in close proximity to the characters, with no separation from a proscenium. Therefore, I could pick up on more of their subtle tendencies, especially during "You Must Meet My Wife." Critics hailed this song as being a highlight in this production. I believe the reason is because in the intimacy of the production allowed Frederick and Desiree have to more subtly play off one another as they slyly deliver lies, puns, and insults. Another instance was in "The Miller's Son." Typically, I have seen the actress playing Petra need to move about the stage dramatically in order to fill the space. However, the staging in this production was much more natural, allowing the movements to emerge more organically from Petra's ever changing emotions and tempos and less from a need to fill space.

Additionally, I liked how director Trevor Nunn used the house space. First, he had Anne and Frederick sit in the house when they watched Desiree's play, creating a much more realistic

staging of this scene, and allowing the audience to concentrate on Desiree's emotion when she discovers Frederick, as that is what the song 'Remember' revolves around. Additionally, towards the end, it was very effective when the chorus members were all to stand behind the audience as they sang songs from earlier in the evening, bringing back memories. It created a more eerie and uncomfortable feeling when we were able to visually concentrate on one character, but audibly concentrate on the chorus who were representing their thoughts.

Furthermore, the reduced orchestrations, which have been an especially noticeable trend since John Doyle's production of *Sweeney Todd* proved effective in this production. As I am writing this journal entry, I am listening to the Original Broadway Cast Recording of "The Miller's Son," (Honestly, I felt I had to listen to *A Little Night Music* while writing my journal entry on *A Little Night Music*) and I can fairly say that I did not miss the grander orchestrations in The Menier Chocolate Factory's production. Right now, my attention is divided between the strong, layered orchestra of string instruments and the lyrics that Petra sings. However, at the Menier Chocolate Factory, I concentrated much more on the lyrics, which is essential in this musical, for Sondheim's lyrics give so much more insight to the characters and the themes of the play, than in many other musicals, and not to mention, are incredibly clever.

This production was also aesthetically darker than other productions. First, the black set of tarnished mirrors was much darker than other versions of this show. I was surprised that one London critic questioned whether the use of doors and tarnished mirrors had become clichéd or not. This critic must have been questioning this in terms of theatre in general, not *A Little Night Music*, for other productions tend to have brighter feel to them, trying to establish the warmth and light of a summer night. Having a darker stage works for *A Little Night Music*, for it highlights the inner darkness of all of the characters and the fact that they all have something

very much bothering. In particular, I found it effective to watch the “Now” “Later” “Soon” sequence as well as “Everyday A Little Death;” in front of black rather than gold. I then enjoyed how the lighting took on a green tone, emerging from the black when the characters entered the country. Also for the first time, the chorus all wore entirely black. In other productions, they had been in more extravagant costumes of various colors. This decision was effective, for it united them as a group and distinguished them from the upper class characters. To me, the black represents the servant’s ability to examine the issues of the play much more neutrally and objectively than the upper class characters, whose interpretation of events is literally colored by their milieu.

The casting for Desiree and Anne was different than many other productions and far more effective. I appreciated that The Menier Chocolate Factory took a chance on casting 19 year old Jessie Buckley to play Anne, although her vocals were not fully developed and slightly shrill. In many other productions, Anne is played by an actress in her mid- 20s who has full opera training, which is not as effective, for she does not seem too far in age from Frederick. In this production, I finally felt that Anne and Frederick were part of two different generations and that their marriage was inappropriate. It made much more sense to me at the end that Anne would elope with Henrick, because Jessie Buckley’s younger age made them appear better matched. I personally believe that it is more important to cast an actress who will allow the story to be rendered more effectively than the one who will allow the score to be rendered more effectively. Similarly, Trevor Nunn brought down the age of Desiree. She is usually played by an actress who is evidently aging, but having 34 year old Hannah Waddingham play her made for a more compelling characterization. She had a more grand presence on the stage than other Desiree’s, and we also saw greater possibility in her future, in that she really could pursue the



stage or a family, but would rather a family. With an older Desiree, there is more of a feeling that acting is out of the cards for her.

There were two components of this production though that I believe were inferior to the other productions I have seen: the first being the staging of the dinner scene in the second half. This was the only scene where the theatre's sightlines and the intimate staging became an issue. The scene was staged so that the actors sat on the floor. It made sense not to bring in a large dinner table, given the simplistic staging. However, seating the actors on the ground made the scene much less effective, and frankly, easy to see, than it had been in other productions.

Additionally, I took issue with the actor playing Henrick. He played the character much more animated and goofy than previous Henricks I had seen. I could not take him seriously as a morally tortured character, which made us laugh at him along with the other characters. This made his suicide attempt seem much more out of place than it usually is.

Finally, I felt that the addition of the song "Silly People" did not add to the production. The song is about fleeting love affairs, and I believe that we already gain a good sense of this idea from "The Miller's Son," and since marriage is the focus of the show, it is unnecessary to add another song that is unrelated to the main theme. However, this feeling may be related to the fact that I was eagerly awaiting for "Send In The Clowns."

-Stephanie Schwartz (Class of 2011 English)

**Marina Carr. *The Cordelia Dream*. (World Premiere 2008). Dir. Selina Cartmell. Wilton's Music Hall**

*The Cordelia Dream* was a beautiful play full of hatred. What was so astonishing to see was how much hatred and loathing was in the performance. After the show, in talking to the

actors, they talked about how it was one of the hardest things for them to do. The Actress commented how hate is an ugly emotion that people instinctively try to hide; they suppress those feelings and words because of how ugly they are. Dredging those feelings up, coaxing them out, and living on stage in that emotion was exhausting for both of them. The actors discussed how they worked for weeks to create that dynamic and relationship, and just be ugly people.

One line about "hate" that stuck out to me was "hate is merely love twisted." I wish I had purchased the play in London, because I would love to go back and re-read it after seeing the show. The characters were named "Woman" and "Man," rather than father and daughter which normally would be considered as part of the definition of their relationship. A parent child relationship is so often thought of as loving, but in this show it seemed anything but loving. The father openly remarked his disdain and hatred towards his daughter, blaming her for his musician's block, and claiming she never achieved anything more than mediocrity. He tells her, "you're a horror, you're a nightmare," and indeed in the second act she becomes just that. It appears as though she is a ghost come back to haunt him and be the end of him.

The role of family is caught up in this hatred, how family dynamics can create more hatred. It was clear that Woman was not on good terms with the rest of her family due to her father and her relationship. Parents are typically supposed to watch their own out strip them, but the father could not handle doing so. Woman chooses to commit suicide, not being able to ignore her hateful relationship with her father. Yet their fates were so intertwined, and one could not survive the other. They haunted each other in life and in death.

Yet we know little facts from the play itself; it is left up to interpretation on the audience's part. We could assume that the second act was only a dream, for it had a dream-like state, what with the Woman dressing in the tuxedo. I think the title itself has an irony in it,

unrelated to *King Lear*. The show was a nightmare rather than a dream. Whether it was the father's worst nightmare, his daughter being successful and him losing himself, or the daughter's nightmare, a father who could never love her for who she was, it was a nightmare nonetheless.

-Julie Eaton (Class of 2009 Political Science)

Marina Carr's commissioned work for the Royal Shakespeare Company follows the father-daughter relationship of two rival musicians. To appease her jealous, bitter father in the twilight of his life, the daughter gives up her ability to compose beautiful music. But as her talent wanes, so does her will to live. As the play progresses, their lives begin to closely parallel the tragedy *King Lear*, as foreshadowed by the daughter's Cordelia dream.

The man's dilapidated apartment building blended well into the uniquely beautiful theater space of the Wilton Music Hall. The Music Hall, self-described as "60% decrepit," is nearing the end of its life, much like the man. This theater was a serendipitous venue for a play featuring music so prominently. The building's amazing acoustics heightened the power behind the man's music.

Unusually, the curtain was not drawn for the interval; the story continued to progress and, as time passes, the man's mail continues to be delivered. Because the man continued to method act on stage during the interval, the transition between the first and second acts appeared seamless. For most intervals, the audience is allowed to briefly pop back into reality, before being immersed again into the play. By not allowing for this discontinuity, the story acquires an eerie feeling of reality. Watching David Hargreaves on stage, shivering naked atop a piano, I was genuinely convinced by his role. Remaining in character for so long is an impressive feat of

endurance. It took serious dedication to strip down in front of an audience, especially in such a frigid theater—I was cold in a jacket.

It was essential that we see the man descend into madness during the interval because it changed the entire tone of the story. The first act, which introduced us to the play's intense father daughter rivalry, seemed firmly rooted in reality. However, the surreal second act, of which parts were certainly delusions, brought the reality of the entire play into question. This illustrated powerfully the absurdity of drama: of course the fiction we just watched wasn't *real*, but our involvement in its plot and characters made it seem so. The characters in this play themselves discuss the play *King Lear*. They talk about Lear and Cordelia as if they were actual people and their story was real, although they know quite well that it is a play.

The second act chronicled the man's descent into dementia. He acts wildly, with quick emotional transitions between anger, fear, and remorse. The play takes a surreal turn when, after he strips down to an animal state like Lear, his daughter puts on his clothes. Her assumption of his tuxedo reflects his belief that she had taken his compositional gifts. It soon becomes apparent that she has killed herself, and her father is haunted by her hallucination. Although he is not able to fully forgive her in his mental state, he clearly feels guilty about his treatment of her. Indeed, at his previous birthday party he played her compositions. The rivalry to which the man dedicated his entire life suddenly seems phony and meaningless—less real than a play.

The play's ending was particularly dramatic. The slowly shrinking spotlight focused our attention on the man's horrified, gaping face, as he comes to grips with this realization, just as the background music reaches a tremendous climax. His face is contorted into a howl, much like Lear's was as he carried the dead body of Cordelia. The music comes from a player piano, whose keys moved on their own as if played by a ghost.

Meeting the actors at the information session following the show abruptly shattered the illusion. I was particularly startled by the thick Irish accent of Michelle Gomez, who played the woman. Michelle remarked on David's incredible acting talent, describing times when she believed he was genuinely upset with her. Such remarkably involved acting was particularly necessary, because they were the only two characters on stage.

-Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012 Chemistry)

**Arthur Schnitzler. *La Ronde* (1900). Dir. Levan Tsuladze.**

I saw this show, with the understanding that it came from the same source material as the musical *Hello Again*. I understood going into the play that the musical was a modern adaptation, with a female part being replaced by a male. I was also intrigued by the fact that the advertisement said that the play was in Georgian with subtitles. I thought that the "subtitles" would actually be a person standing to the side of the stage with all the lines printed on giant white boards. I was not expecting the subtitles to be performed as if we were listening to an incomplete radio show, where the hosts can suddenly get involved in the action. Also, the subtitles were poorly written, almost as if the script was thrown through Babelfish, an online translator, and printed.

Returning to the fact that this show came from *La Ronde*, the original version of *Hello Again*, I was very surprised to see so many rape scenes. I do not believe that the source has the encounters written that way, but I have not read the original play. Either way, these scenes were very uncomfortable for me to watch, especially considering how close we were to the actors.

-Montoia Davis (Class of 2010 English)

Seeing a production of *La Ronde* in Georgian was a unique, yet frustrating experience. It was my first time seeing a play performed in a different language. Unfortunately, the translations were not audible enough to gain much meaning from them. My lack of understanding resulted in me making comparisons to 'Hello Again' and particularly noting the production aspects that seemed to serve to provide contrast.

There were several differences between *La Ronde* and *Hello Again* that I was very surprised by. *La Ronde* featured more rape and the encounters took a darker tone. The men had significantly more power over the women, which I believe to be a reflection of the times that Schnitzler wrote the play. The scenes seemed to lose their individual identity and follow more of a similar pattern than the scenes in *Hello Again*. The pattern being that the men convinced or forced the women into sex, and the women wound up wounded and dejected by the end of scene as a result. This feeling may be owing to the fact that I could not understand much of the dialogue and my opinion of the scenes was more based on actor's physicality.

One aspect that I found interesting and preferred to *Hello Again* was that there was always a blackout during the sex scenes. Both plays serve as examinations of the motives to pursue sex, and then the psychological effects of it, not as treatises on the act of sex itself. I know that many people who saw *Hello Again* were distracted by the sex scenes taking place onstage. Therefore, in *La Ronde*, it is effective to not show it, because it places more emphasis on the psychology surrounding it. The sudden and dramatic nature of each blackout signified the harsh nature of the sexual encounters.

There were several aspects of this production that provided contrast against the dark sexual encounters that I found very interesting and was able to sense despite the language barrier. First, there was the role of the interpreters. Instead of trying to play down their presence, the

director decided to integrate them into the action by having them act as a flirtatious couple. In this way, the interpreters almost served as unbiased commentators for the play's action and provided a contrast between the harsher relationships played out onstage. The only aspect I did not like was how during the blackouts during the sex scenes, they stood up, mocked, and ridiculed the couple onstage. I believe this took some of the seriousness out of the scenes, which I imagine was a conscious directorial choice, but not one that I agreed with.

I also enjoyed the use of music. Each scene of *Hello Again* takes place in a different decade and features a different music style. While I enjoyed the liberties that this concept gave Michael John LaCuisa in writing his score, it created confusion as to how this could be a circle of lovers. Were the characters the same or different in their first and second scenes? On the other hand, in this production of *La Ronde*, they used the same song as a transition between every scene. The song was a sweet, innocent and helplessly romantic 1940's love song. To me, it served two purposes. The first was to create a uniformity of time, establishing that all of the scenes were taking place in the same era. I enjoyed this, because it gave me the sense that this really was a circle of lovers existing in the same society. Additionally, it seemed to serve as a devastating foil to the action taking place in the scenes, for innocent romance of the song contrasted with the harsh realities of relationship between men and women explicated within the scenes.

The other instance of contrast was the ninth scene, which involved The Actress and the Senator. This scene took on a farcical, comic tone and incorporated *Romeo and Juliet*, which seemed ironic in this context, and then suddenly ended in death. This scene was refreshing from the others, finally breaking from the pattern that I was sensing from the other scene.

The character of The Whore particularly stood out as a contrast to me. Her freedom, nonchalance, and willingness to celebrate life reminded me of Petra from *A Little Night Music*. The actress moved more freely and comfortably with her body than the other actresses onstage. This physical freedom exemplified her sexual freedom a freedom that many of the other women seemed to lack.

-Stephanie Schwartz (Class of 2011 English)

**Sophocles. *Oedipus* (c. 429 BC). Premiere of Frank McGuinness' new translation (2008).**

**Dir. Jonathan Kent. The Olivier Theatre**

Until the 20th century, “tragedy” only applied to important figures in a given society, whose downfall negatively impacts that society. What I most liked about Jonathan Kent’s production of Frank McGuinness’s translation of *Oedipus* was how the set design, costumes, and chorus emphasized this characteristic of tragedy, portraying Oedipus as a public figure. More specifically, I thought that Oedipus resembled a modern political figure; his life is always under the circumspection of his people, and his private affairs impact the lives of his citizens, which in this production included the audience members.

The large, rotating double doors that dominated the center of the stage established Oedipus’s public and private domain in Thebes. As I interpreted it, the area in front of the doors, the audience included, represented the land of Thebes. All of the production’s action took place in the public domain, establishing that Oedipus’ story cannot be hidden from the people of Thebes. The area behind the doors represented the privacy of the royal family’s home, and only those characters ever crossed through. As an audience, we could partially see into the area behind the doors, but could never see any action there. When the doors fell at the end, there was



no longer a need to distinguish public and private space, because the house of Laius had ceased to exist.

The famous Olivier Theatre turntable was used subtly in order to explicate Oedipus' demise. The turntable gradually rotated throughout the show, making a single revolution by the end. The doors (and by extension public domain) began directly facing the front of house, and gradually revolved throughout the play, so that they ended in the same position that they began. Kent utilized this rotation to powerfully stage Oedipus' demise as a public figure. At the very beginning of the show, the doors opened dramatically, signaling the emergence of an important figure. Oedipus radiated power and authority as he entered through the doors, swiftly walked straight to the audience and addresses us as the people of Thebes. As he provided reassurances on the state of Thebes, I felt as though I was a citizen in some form of town hall meeting. When the doors arrived at their original position towards the end of the play, they again dramatically opened, and Oedipus entered through them to address the audience, but he was now blinded and bloodied. I interpreted these opposing, yet identically staged entrances into public domain as a powerful illustration of a public figure's demise in power.

Before discussing other elements that established Oedipus as a public figure, I would like to point out how the color of the scenery also illustrated themes of the play. To me, the faded gold on the doors and turntable connected to the idea of tragedy, because the different layers of rust symbolized different stages of deterioration, and Oedipus deteriorates as the play progresses. I interpreted the black backdrop as representing figurative blindness to truth. As Teiresias, the blind prophet who can see truth, entered, two of the panels opened to reveal light. Later, when Oedipus saw the truth about his fate and became literally blind, the backdrop became entirely white, exemplifying this ironic element of Sophocles' text. This irony especially struck a chord

when Creon said to Oedipus, “you had your day; it’s turned into night.” Furthermore, the black backdrop emphasized how Thebes is plagued while Oedipus is blind to truth, and then relieved of plague when Oedipus discovers the truth.

Oedipus’ costume also significantly contributed to why I believe that Kent wanted to portray Oedipus similarly to a modern political figure, as opposed to a traditional monarch. Upon his entrance, Oedipus sported a full modern business suit: black jacket, tucked in white shirt, and tie. The fact that the chorus wore the same attire reflected Oedipus’ desire to be a personable leader. As he dealt with the political scrutiny of the plague, he removed his jacket, and as he discovered more truths, he began to further undo his clothing; rolling up his sleeves, untucking his shirt, and unbuttoning his shirt. When he entered after being blinded and bloodied, his clothes were stained and torn up. In this way, Kent manifested Oedipus’ demise by means of attire.

The chorus was another significant contribution to Kent’s production. I, at first, interpreted them as simply representing the people of Thebes, but then, in class, we discussed how they represented the landowners of Thebes, which is an idea that made even more sense to me. When they emerged from the audience at the top of the show, I viewed them as our envoys, but now I think of them being the class above us, for the higher class was more important, as a result, got to participate in the action. I was impressed by the chorus actor’s ensemble work, for they moved as a unit through the public domain, and effectively played off one another. Occasionally, when Oedipus and Jocasta delivered soliloquies, I chose to watch the various reactions of the chorus instead. When the chorus sang, they commented on the state of affairs, and the harmonies allowed different voices to emerge, which to me, represented different responses from the landowners of Thebes. In the arguments between Creon and Oedipus, I noticed in the staging that one man could appear have more power over the other simply by

having the chorus stand behind them, for it appeared as though they had the support of the landowners behind them.

Ralph Fiennes's interpretation of Oedipus also contributed to Kent's concept. When Fiennes reassured the people of Thebes that he understood their pain and intended to rectify the plague, he possessed ease, confidence, smoothness, and personability. Consequently, the speech strongly reminded me of Barack Obama's reassurances that he will rectify the current state of America. This was a powerful connection because many in America view Barack Obama as a form of savior who represents the people, as the people of Thebes viewed Oedipus. Throughout the play, Fiennes' initially confident and smooth physicality deteriorated. Towards the beginning, when other characters began to reveal information, I noticed that Fiennes walked with the slightest bent away from them, as if shying away. Next, he began to fold his arms insecurely. When Oedipus discovered the truth, he convincingly lost control of his voice and body. Therefore, I could not only see Oedipus's demise by means of physicality, but could also see how his lack of control over his body reflected the lack of control over his fate. I felt that Fiennes interpreted the character as someone who genuinely desired to do good for his country. I was surprised not to get a strong sense of hubris from Fiennes, which I expected from the text of the play. I enjoyed that interpretation, because it made Oedipus more sympathetic and therefore tragic.

Clare Higgins as Jocasta also added a great deal to the production. When she reassured Oedipus against the prophecy, she did so just as a mother would reassure a son. When we later learned that Jocasta does believe in prophecies, these instances of reassurance increased in power. I noticed several instances in which her most subtle tone inflections and movement would

denote motherly behavior. Additionally, I felt that she comported herself not as a regal queen, but as a first lady to the state, for she commanded great authority from the men onstage.

*Oedipus* is a tale that deals with themes of fate and incest, which most audience members have trouble establishing a connection to. However, with Kent's approach, the audience can look at the tale of *Oedipus* in context of modern society, and ponder how the private demise of our leaders publicly impacts all of society. This production forced me to wonder: What would happen to us if Barack Obama had a personal discovery of this horrid nature? What did happen to us when we discovered the indiscretions Bill Clinton's personal life? How is it the same as *Oedipus* and how is it different from *Oedipus*?

-Stephanie Schwartz (Class of 2011 English)

This was the second show that I saw in the Olivier theatre and because of the peculiar set up of the audience and the size of the circular stage, I couldn't help but compare and contrast the way they used the stage to the way that the production of *War Horse* did. While *War Horse* utilized their ability to manipulate the malleability of the theatre for the use of special effects, *Oedipus* took a very different angle. Everything about the play, in specific reference to the set itself, the stage, the chorus, and the portrayal itself of the story, all seemed to fall into the mold of Aristotelian unity and tragedy.

The set was very overtly striking but also had several subtle nuances which were all salient to the themes of the play. It was simple, as would have been the case in the time of the original production. The entire stage was interestingly askew. Had I not seen *War Horse* prior to this, I might have simply thought this was the natural curve of the stage, but knowing that this was an addition, I knew it must be deliberate. It dawned on me that the slightly spherical

convexity of the stage resembled that of the Earth, and it seemed like they were all literally standing upon a massive globe. It was also on a slight axis further supporting my hypothesis. Overt message-1, Subtlety-0. A subtlety of the set design, which was so faint that I didn't even notice it at first, was the rotation of the stage. Throughout the show, the stage almost continuously rotated and did one complete revolution, signifying the completion of one day, which was the amount of time that passed in the show. Overt message-1, Subtlety-1. The color of the set is what appealed to me most. Everything was decrepit and murky, almost the color of copper and rust. Other than the blatant allusion to the Bronze Age, the set itself had a sense of decay. Things were not collapsing into rubble, but were rather just slowly melting away into a rusty oblivion. Given the story, in which there are central themes of a decaying empire, Lear's decaying psyche, and the kingdom's decaying throne and power, the tangibility of the decomposition of the set was a striking sensory aid to the motif.

The chorus had a very interesting role in this production. As opposed to being normal townspeople, they were all dressed in matching suits, which seemed to posit them above Lear as opposed to below him. They acted as a unit and since this play is in the style of in medias res, they also offered additional information about social consciousness and the paradigms of the time. Since *Oedipus* is such a classic example of a tragedy based around catharsis, the chorus also provided some emotional background, almost like a narration. The chorus in this production was unique not only because of their higher status appearance, but because of their level of group mind. They seemed like an arguing bunch of politicians, who would then unite, both physically and in song. Their song would be marked by syncopated time and uneasy rhythms and disjointed rounds, but would then all unite for one triumphant word or phrase. They were like a school of fish, momentarily separating into chaos and just as quickly reuniting as one entity.

Interestingly, their bench was the only stationary object on stage, as the entire stage rotated, but that stood still. This, I believe, created two separate plains of existence, almost as if the chorus was on a separate stage, completely separate from the diegesis of the action while they were singing. Their high class stature and level of unity made them seem like Greek aristocrats, which in comparison to Oedipus's, made him (being Oedipus) seem even more fragile, flawed, vulnerable, and ultimately hopelessly human.

When reading *Oedipus*, I could never have really imagined what his portrayal on stage could be like. This production made it very clear. As I said, the play really bought into the idea of invoking emotions of the audience. Ralph Fiennes final scene on stage where he cut out his eyes surely created that for me. I was amazed, disgusted, disturbed, shocked, and damn impressed with his acting. Never have I really seen a character of so much humility and vulnerability command a stage like that. He was somehow both overwhelmingly domineering and disconcertingly pitiful. He comes out wearing the same clothes as the chorus, which immediately drops him down to their social level, and his tear filled screams of emotion highlight a level of honest helplessness that I didn't imagine in Oedipus. That is not to say that I imagined him as strong, as the story is of his decay and downfall, but to have him wearing his emotions, desires, and his blood on his sleeves made his final act of self-mutilation not only that much more discomfoting, but made him that much more powerless and the Gods that much more powerful. He was no stately King and was at no point on a pedestal above the citizens as Creon was, and it was his portrayal as a mere insecure mortal which made his performance so powerful. To see someone at their weakest demonstrate pure strength in their weakness is some powerful acting.

-Mark Sobel (Class of 2010 Psychology)

**Neil LaBute. *In a Dark Dark House* (2007). Dir. Michael Attenborough. Almeida Theatre**

The title works into the play in several different ways. “House” represents both the house Terry and Drew grew up in and the tree house where the homosexual acts took place. The word also speaks about that time in the past in which the traumatic events within the story are housed. “Dark Dark” is a more poetic way to say “very dark.” By squaring the word, the ominous feeling surrounding the play is increased. The two words then describe the violence within Terry’s house, as in the darkness associated with his father’s physical abuse. They can signify the actual darkness of the tree house at the time of the acts, and also Terry’s hidden and complex emotions regarding the tree house. Ultimately, there is the darkness associated with the past.

For a play with a title that emphasizes darkness through repetition, the set has exactly the opposite feeling. The entire stage is covered with grass, and not a plains type of grass, but a lush green, cultivated, brilliant grass. It is tiered to represent the actual contours of nature. The set is welcoming and happy, a humorous irony to the play’s content. Perhaps the stage is constructed as such to symbolize Terry’s hidden feelings beneath his calm other brother exterior in the first act of the play. In the beginning of the first act the audience is meant to believe that Drew is the one with the real problems and that Terry is the more stable one. But through playing with the idea that initial appearances are often wrong, the roles of the brothers switch, and the green grass does not seem as inviting.

Also one would think from the title that this play would take place within a house. It would probably be appropriate in that respect if this play switched titles with *August: Osage County*. Sounds beautiful? Right? But no, there are no houses to be seen. Instead *In a Dark Dark House* is set in some supposedly relaxing locations: an asylum, a miniature golf course, and

a summer evening in a suburban backyard. Granted LaBute put his own sadistic spins on these locations. In reality, the park is located within a rehab center. The miniature golf course is run by a 16-year-old girl whose father molests her. And the backyard is tainted by the noise of construction and it is at the home of a materialistic, amoral, adulterer. None of these places are really as happy as they appear.

Furthermore on the note of false appearances, all three of the characters undergo an unveiling. I have already talked about how Terry appears to be self-assured when we first meet him, but by the end of the first act it is apparent that he is not. By the end of the play Terry is seen as a highly unstable, conflicted individual who has been in prison and has difficulty holding a job. Drew changes in the other direction. In the beginning he seems to be a helpless drug addict. Later we discover that he is very intelligent (as he is able to deceive Terry into telling his story at the court), a millionaire and a former lawyer. He still appears to be amoral, once we learn how he lied to Terry, but the reshaping of our initial conception of him is drastic. Jennifer's change is not so intense, but she moves from being an innocent teenager to a highly sexual creature. This sexuality comes through with her picking up the bottle with her teeth and then her very direct pursuance of Terry.

As for the darkness of the past in Terry's mind, it is an intense revelation at the end of the play when he reveals that he enjoyed what he did with Todd. The change from appearing to be devoutly against Todd and hating him, to admitting to loving the guy correlates with the other facades in the play: the grass, the settings, the characters.

Is LaBute simply arguing that nothing is as it seems? Or is he trying to say something else? Maybe *In a Dark Dark House* is an instruction for us to look harder at what we already see because it is likely that we are missing something very important.



I think it is interesting that the British are so interested LaBute's plays because of how they reveal the American psyche. Although this play is singularly exaggerated, its comment on the Protestant American psyche and homosexuality is phenomenally accurate. Before our class discussion I never considered that our America's hidden fear and current exploitation of sexuality was solely typical of our country. I think that this would be an interesting topic to research further.

-Adam Witzel (Class of 2010 English)

***Phantom of the Opera* (1986). Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Lyrics by Charlie Hart and Richard Stilgoe. Book by Richard Stilgoe and Andrew Lloyd Webber. Dir. Harold Prince. Her Majesty's Theatre**

Today was wonderful. Though I had the option of touring London, seeing and doing things that are totally and completely unrelated to theater, I chose to see two optional performances – The *Phantom of the Opera* and *In Blood: the Bacchae*. I wasn't quite sure what to expect when I walked into Her Majesty's Theater alone for the matinee performance. I was eagerly anticipating it, however, because Professor Peck had informed me that the musical was created for this particular theater. I had previously seen another performance of *Phantom* that was absolutely incredible, though I tried to keep an open mind. Things were looking pretty good when I purchased a 45-pound ticket for 25 pounds! (I would like to add that I am writing this entry with music from the production blasting in the background.) I was impressed with the set; there were two objects covered in sheets that were identified to be a poster advertising Hannibal and a chandelier. And then the chandelier began to move, flying over the spellbound audience. A man in a wheelchair was watching the process; though I assumed him to be Raoul, he was

never actually identified. I adored the background for Hannibal, the poster for which would be auctioned in the future. The majority of the musical was the same as the performance I had seen before. One aspect of this performance which I had not seen before was when the actors switched positions so the audience felt as if they were looking behind stage; this allowed me to gain a new perspective. I feel that the director intended for the audience to become closer to the actors through this because the audience could see them firsthand. Another change that I did not expect was when Raoul first tries to kiss Christine after her opening performance; she, of course, turns him down.

There were a couple ways in which this production may be compared to others I have seen. There were several plays within a play; as mentioned, the actors put on Hannibal, as well as another performance, which was not named. There was also considerably less swearing in this performance. We have seen other musicals and none have had language this classy. Of course, the lack of foul language could be due to the fact that this musical is older and has been held to high and strict standards. Whatever the reason, the beautiful music and inoffensive language were a nice relief. And the performance did not lose any ground for its lack. I believe that the director succeeded in his inferred intentions to produce a classy, beautiful, and memorable production. After all, it has been running for over twenty years with few changes, none being major. I wondered if the costumes are similar to the original ones. I also debated how much the technology had changed that allowed this performance to be different than the one that opened so many years ago. Had the music changed? Any language? New characters created or old ones removed? Although the production was intended for this theater, it is still possible that various changes have taken place; it is actually inevitable. I really enjoyed this musical; I had debated going when I had realized that I would be finding my way to the theater

and back on my own. Looking back, I am glad that I started my day with this lively and beautiful production.

- Janna Orons (Class of 2012 English)

***Carousel* (1945). Dir. Lindsay Posner. Music and Lyrics by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. Savoy Theatre**

**-Coming Soon-**

***Sunset Boulevard* (1994). Music by Andrew Lloyd-Webber. Book and lyrics by Don Black and Christopher Hampton. Based on the Billy Wilder film (1950). Dir. Craig Revel Horwood. Comedy Theatre.**

After doing some quick research about *Sunset Boulevard* I was surprised to see that it actually had a lot of success in the past, winning seven Tony Awards. However I found an enlightening quote on Wikipedia by Vincent Canby, “Awards don’t really tell you much when the competition is feeble or simply nonexistent, as was the case the year that *Sunset Boulevard* won its Tony.” I like the irony inherent in the performance. The musical is about a failed actress who no longer has countless fans following her, and as it is about that, the theater was at least half empty when I saw performance. It was definitely the least attended performance I saw on the trip. But enough bad things about the play. The orchestra is remarkable, and I thought the set was interesting with its invocation of Hollywood and the plot.

The real spectacle of the play lies within the actors’ ability to perform many different things. In addition to acting, they sing, dance and serve as the orchestra, playing their instruments onstage. The collective talent is impressive.

Several props on the stage are representative of the different happenings in the plot. Most obvious is the massive side portrait of a distinguished and youthful Norma Desmond at the rear of the stage. Hanging in Norma's house, this portrait is representative of her vanity and distorted image of herself. It also shows how she is unwilling to let go of the past and come to terms with the present. In the picture her head is positioned with her chin up and her eyes looking up into nothing, which suggests how she is aloof and refuses to look at reality.

Additionally there are other props that reveal similar things about Norma. The spiral staircase that leads up to Norma's bedroom is broken at the top; the steps are jagged and look old and weak. Depicting her failure to continue to rise in fame in Hollywood, this staircase also speaks to her eventual fall from the spotlight. The candelabras on the wall are covered in cobwebs, which imply that this house does not see much company. It also gives the set a dead and eerie quality that correlates with Norma's possessiveness towards Ben.

-Adam Witzel (Class of 2010 English)

**Frances Viner, *In Blood: The Bacchae* (2008). Dir. Noah Birksted-Brown. Arcola Theatre**

This play was an interesting one. The title aside, I thought that it was a remarkable play about the racial and class tensions of 1920's Brazil with an excellent use of music, acting, and capoeira. Immediately I was struck by the similarity between the chorus of *Oedipus* and the chorus of *In Blood*. In *In Blood*, the chorus will sing at turning points during the play, and like Jonathan Kent's production of Frank McGuinness's *Oedipus*, one member would begin the song and the rest would follow. Like *Loot* and *Gethsemane*, this play speaks of the corruption of those sworn to protect, however (again like *Oedipus*), the corruption seems to extend further than that. The play talks about the abolition of slavery in Brazil, and how even 100 years later, the

descendants of those slaves are unable to make better lives for themselves. The still lingering prejudice against the Afro-Brazilian descendants is exemplified by the character of Gordilho, a police chief who enjoys snorting cocaine in his free time. I thought that Gordilho was by far the strongest character in the production. He seemed the most realistic to the times for me. While Besouro, the main protagonist, was a strong character, he seemed too relaxed to me, just kind of in there but not really important; especially in the scenes he shared with Gordilho.

While the connection between Gordilho and Pentheus can be seen in the way both stand for tradition and the maintaining of social order, the connection between Besouro and Dionysus is quite tentative. Because of his rather lax demeanor it does not appear that he is standing up for anything. While Dionysus was avenging his mother and demanding to be honored as a deity, I do not really get that feeling from Besouro. Besouro did give his speech about the death of his mother at the hands of Gordilho, and he spoke about the unfair treatment of the Afro-Brazilians, but I did not get the sense that he was trying to remedy the situation in any way. While Gordilho did go mad in the end, it was because of a drug overdose, not because of anything that Besouro did. Gordilho manages to be like Pentheus also in the way he is repulsed yet greatly intrigued by the Afro-Brazilian culture. What is also interesting about *In Blood: The Bacchae* is that there were no women in the production. This is interesting as the human followers of Dionysus were the women Maenads and were the most significant of all of his followers.

-Dawn Batts (Class of 2010 Interdepartmental Program Arts & Sciences)

I believe I would have enjoyed this production more if the title did not display *The Bacchae* so prominently, because the majority of the play had nothing to do with Euripides' *Bacchae*. First of all, there were no women in the play; the women are the bacchae! Granted,

women are discussed and have a prominent offstage role such as Besouro's mother who was killed then worshipped from afar as an object of love by the dictatorial police chief Gordilho. or the woman with whom Besouro describes having a passionate lovemaking session with in which he inadvertently transfers his powers to her. But really, these women are no Bacchae.

On the way to the production I actually sat next to a woman on the bus who was originally going to play the Dionysus character (Besouro). This would have added a very interesting element to the production to have the most masculine character played by a woman and I half-wished they had gone through with it. But the actor who ended up playing Besouro was actually really great, even though the play itself was a flop.

There is the rub: the actors did a wonderful job and the copoeira (a Brazilian martial art/dance) performers were quite phenomenal at what they did; but it just never coalesced into an actual storyline. The capoeirais seemed to represent the Bacchae, but as they were neither maniacally wild nor cannibalistically violent, the attempted subterfuge of Gordilho to enter into their mysterious capoeira circle did not capture the power of Pentheus' initiation into the Dionysian rites. The fate of Gordilho overdosing on cocaine seemed quite anticlimactic, and the agony was extended by the final speech of the man in white who always came onstage to talk to Gordilho, but no one had any idea who he was or what he was ever really there for. I suppose since he never really sided with either opponent he was meant to provide a bird's eye view of an unbiased narrator, but even so it wasn't very clear or effective.

-Beverly Ferguson (Class of 2009 Eastman/English)

### **Tour of Shakespeare's Birthplace**

Today was a day that I had immensely looked forward to: it was our fieldtrip to Stratford-upon-Avon. Aside from awakening at the ungodly hour of 7:00 A.M., I had a fantastic day. The bus ride there went by fairly quickly, probably because I was asleep for the majority of it. When we finally arrived at the quaint, little town, Dr. Peck was generous enough to take us all on a tour of the house in which Shakespeare was born. Though we were not allowed to take photos, I will never forget walking through that old, little home. It was so hard for me to believe that I was standing in a room in which so famous a man was born. We were able to see glass windowpanes, on which visitors had etched their names; I made my own mark by signing the guest book on my way out. I also visited Shakespeare's burial site. I was surprised that he was buried indoors; I had expected to find a beautiful grave outside, covered with flowers and wreaths. There were several other tour groups paying their respects at the same time, so my friends and I had to fight to get a closer view.

- Janna Orons (Class of 2012 English)

**William Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet* (1595). Dir. Neil Bartlett. Courtyard Theatre**

As I sat down to watch *Romeo and Juliet* at the Courtyard Theatre, I wondered "How does one put on a fresh production of *Romeo and Juliet*?" This play has become so well known and in contemporary society that it is almost clichéd. The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Romeo and Juliet* felt unique to me because of the emphasis on society, as well as the character's decisions and actions. However, I felt the actors portraying Romeo and Juliet thwarted this production from feeling completely revitalized.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the private lovers and the public society impact one another. Society keeps the lovers from being with one another, and as the Capulets and Montagues are important

figures in society, the lovers death impacts society. My favorite aspect of Neil Bartlett's production was the emphasis of society's role in the tragedy. In class, we discussed the conflict of private versus public space, and Kent effectively established this concept.

As Neil Bartlett set his production in 1940's/ 1950's Italy, I found it effective that he employed a seven piece traditional Italian Fiesta band. Even before the house lights dimmed, the band began to enter, already establishing a communal feel in that they would use traditional Italian instruments to musically collaborate, to tell their society's story. Throughout the show, whenever the music played, it not only helped to set a tone for the scenes, but also reminded the audience of Italian culture and traditions, which is what the lovers try to break away from. In particular, I was enthralled in the final scene by the drumbeat. The drum added desperation to the scene, because I felt as though society was encroaching on the scene, and that it became more and more urgent for Juliet to fulfill her action before they arrive.

Additionally, Bartlett wisely used the chorus. There were 23 members in this company. The prologue was divided up by lines and spoken by several different company members around the stage, establishing that all figures on the stage felt some need to tell part of this story, even if they could only contribute one line. When all of the company members appeared again to perform the third act prologue, I almost felt as though they were gossipers coming from the party. Additionally, they facilitated telling the story by playing a role in scene changes. For example, in the scene the morning after Romeo and Juliet are married, the mafia men literally do take Romeo away from Juliet's bedchamber. Also, I found it extremely effective how company members could change the scene by snapping their fingers, triggering a change in lighting. As I recall, neither Romeo nor Juliet had the ability to do this. The snaps were not only sharp and aesthetically pleasing to watch, but explicated how society has the power to change the mood,



and the pace of this story. The final image of the play fittingly consisted of the entire company surrounding Juliet's grave, taking in the Prince's famous final lines.

Bartlett also used lighting effectively to not only create public and private space, but also show passage of time. I found the lighting for the balcony scene to be particularly effective, for it created a clear divide between the space that Romeo occupied versus the space that Juliet occupied, which he wanted to break into. In other instances, a lighting change would denote when Romeo had to leave his private romantic world with Juliet, and return to the public world. The lighting also served to establish the time of day that scenes were taking place, which I found to be a significant contribution to the production, as the passage of time is a significant theme in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Another aspect of Bartlett's production that felt fresh to me was his emphasis on action. Once again, he effectively used lighting, as it would often change to denote action. I found it especially effective that he staged the fight scenes, so that instead of swords, the character's utilized knives. As Bartlett described in an interview, he did not want his audience to think of fights as interruptions to the drama, but instead wanted the audience to see how and the why violence erupts from the characters. This concept was underscored by the sound effects utilized when the actors drew their knives. Furthermore, the knives also placed more emphasis on the actor's physicality's during the fights as opposed to the properties they were carrying.

The performances from the actors portraying Romeo and Juliet kept the production from being as revitalized as I thought it had the potential to be. The actress portraying Juliet put too much emphasis on her rhetoric and came off unnaturally. I felt that she was particularly guilty of this when speaking her more famous lines. She also was quick to resort to grunts and moans in order to express emotion, which I noticed often solicited uncomfortable chuckles from the

audience. What bothered me most of all though was that she did not portray any of the young naïveté that I believe essential to Juliet in telling this story. She begins rebelling from her family right from when her mother first brings up the idea of marriage, not from when she meets Romeo. As a result, we do not gain as strong of a sense in her change in values as caused by her romance. Later in the play, the actress did not appear to emote or feel vulnerable by the increasingly difficult circumstances Juliet encountered. On the other hand, I found that the actor playing Romeo provided an effective boyish naïveté at the beginning. He presented his soliloquies with simplicity that made them feel like a stream of consciousness, but like Juliet, did not emote strongly enough to his dire circumstances towards the end. As a result, I did not feel as though Juliet had a very strong attachment to Romeo, and there was a significant lack of chemistry between the two actors, which harms the very foundation of this play. I later asked myself if Barlett possibly want this to happen. Did he want us as an audience to view *Romeo and Juliet* not as being about two people rebelling against society because they are in love, but two people using one another as means of rebelling against society? If this was Bartlett's intention, I disagree with it. This interpretation takes vitality out of the play, that these two lovers absolutely must escape the restrictions of society to be together, even if it means death. I did not experience that desperation in Bartlett's production.

-Stephanie Schwartz (Class of 2011 English)

***Don John* (2008). Director and Adaptor, Emma Rice. Courtyard Theatre**

This was definitely my favorite play of the entire two-week trip. I went in with pretty low expectations; the free program did not look all that promising. I was worried that the music would be bad, which it had been for a lot of the productions we'd seen but which would have

been unforgivable for a play based on Mozart's opera Don Giovanni. When we sat down, I was worried we wouldn't be able to see all of the action from our side perspective even though we were near the front. I was wrong on all accounts! The play was phenomenal, the music was the best I'd heard for our whole time London (if not for the whole semester.. just kidding), and the seats were great! The dancing was excellent as well. I really felt the difference with such a tight-knit acting company that had been together for many years; the level of quality was very high, and all the disparate elements of the production came together in equally sophisticated ways, which was magic. I was not influenced one bit by any negative reviews I read, but I am convinced this production was simply so well done and did such interesting things with the Don Giovanni plot by giving it issues relevant in the 1970's, a time period that resonates with our culture still. The characters were each directly taken from Don Giovanni and the plot was very closely related with that of the opera (something we didn't get when we saw the capoeira version that claimed to be related in some way to *The Bacchae* but wasn't).

The 1970's resounded throughout this production, with the go-go dancers in their pastel sweater-vests and the black and white television that kept showing snippets of then-popular shows. The play used many songs that came out in or before 1978, such as Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" and The Crystals' "He Hit Me" (And It Felt Like a Kiss), the latter of which was a direct reference to Zerlina's Mozart counterpart, who sings the aria "Batti, Batti, o bel Masetto" (Beat me, Beat me, oh dear Masetto). The radio which the band kept turning on throughout the play was filled with awful news about the state of the world circa 1978 - but they would of course ignore the news and turn it to a station with music and begin bobbing their heads in time in an almost brainwashed fashion. This to me repeatedly reinforced the desire to live for pleasure

and ignore the other parts of life (and the other people in the world), which was the mantra of Don John.

John was a very interesting character with a lot of issues, quite a bit more complex in my opinion than Mozart's Giovanni. He lived only for the now, and even stated that "tomorrow is not important." This was contrasted by the happy exchanges between Alan and Zerlina in which they teach each other their respective languages. They repeat "Utro, Utro, Utro," which in Polish means "Tomorrow" - they have hope for tomorrow because of the love they find in each other. Don John is incapable of such hope because he is incapable of truly loving someone other than himself (though he obviously doesn't do such a great job of loving himself either since he basically OD's in the end). The actor was great at portraying the physicality of the Don, not only in his sexual exploits but in his cat-like climbing of the multi-tiered set.

There was a great moment of feminism during the scene in which Nobby was strung up by his ankles - in the very bed sheets he would have violated Anna in, which she, Zerlina, and all the conquered women of Don John now use against him. Zerlina violently tells him off: "How dare you fuck us to keep us quiet," a statement that seems directed not just to Nobby because Nobby has stopped being "just Nobby." He has become Don John and in a way has come to represent all men who take advantage of women.

-Beverly Ferguson (Class of 2009 Eastman/English)

As far as pure entertainment is concerned, I rank *Don John* next to *Twelfth Night* and *La Cage Aux Folles*. This play is funky, sexy, loud, shocking and fun. I kind of wished that I had had another pint at The Garrick Inn beforehand, just so I could better connect with the play's festivities. At the end of the play, the Kneehigh Theatre Group explained how they like to put on

fun performances. *Don John* is certainly one. Just as the play is fun, there are also some serious overtones in it, including the study on unwed mothers that went into the play's production, rape, the isolation the distraught year 1978, the hopelessness of some (damned) characters and the sundering of relationships. As we discussed in class, the play is a series of capsules, of moments, put together, which are furthered by the presence of an actual capsule (manipulative boxcar) that serves as the setting for much of the play's action. However, this play functions as a capsule in another way, as a time capsule. It captures 1978 with its setting, the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Mozart's production of *Don Giovanni* and then present day with the performance set in front of our contemporary economic and social concerns.

The play begins with bums warming themselves around a garbage can fire avoiding the news on the radio and bobbing their heads to the funky beat. Then it shifts from a preacher speaking in an empty church, to an IV sustained geriatric patient, then to a scene of rape. These scenes are comments on our present day, and their universality is even more apparent with the time warp, suggesting that worldly concerns are not singular to our time but continuous throughout time. The contemporary implication is apparent in the play as the bums represent the current world economic crisis, the preacher speaks to a lack of faith, the dying officer corresponds with our current medical dilemmas while rape is directly associated with the 300 interviews that went into this production. Thankfully, Barack Obama has just been inaugurated. It is interesting that despite all of heavy concerns *Don John* is still a very fun play, which I believe is a comment on what one's outlook should be during hard times.

Accompanied with *Don John*'s social comments is its decree to care. Don John does not care about anyone as he rapes, murders, and ruins lives and friendships. He is hopelessly evil and his t-shirt says so with "Damned" written across it. And damned he is, as he consumes

himself in his search for new experiences with drugs, insanity and a desire for an impossible reality. He is representative of both the world's social problems and the people who do nothing about them. Thus the play argues, because John is so clearly evil, that one should not be narcissistic and impulsive like him, but that one should care.

Now the play does not simply argue that one should immediately go to work for a charity or orphanage, but rather something more complex, which connects caring for oneself with caring about other people. Several characters undergo personal reevaluations. Zerlina's fiancé tries to make himself more of a man and Nobby rejects Don John's tutorship, while Anna realizes that she does not have what she wants. Through the nursing of her father and her sexless marriage Anna chains herself to other people without regard for her own desires. Ironically, Don John teaches her to care about herself and therefore she leaves the stage at the end of the play en route to caring about herself. The play suggests through her revelation that her type of selflessness is wrong because it lacks care for herself. Thus, implicitly, there is an appropriate balance between caring for oneself and for others.

I must say something about the play's music. It is exhilarating. It stretches from original songs from *Don Giovanni*, to live rock performances that are rooted in the late 70s but are reminiscent of contemporary music. And again, this traverse of time is a sort of reverence for the past within the present. The contrast between Mozart and rock is sharp; however, the combination works well within the performance because the classical rhythms smooth some of the play's rougher sounds and themes. Furthermore, I consistently found myself bobbing my head or tapping my feet to the band's music. Although the plot and characters were very interesting, I think that the music was an important factor for developing the play's magnificence. It is like a glass of wine that heightens the taste of a meal.

It was priceless to see Jonathan, Dan, Mark and Montoya pulled up on stage.

-Adam Witzel (Class of 2010 English)

**Tracy Letts. *August: Osage County*. Dir. Anna D. Shapiro. Lyttelton Theatre**

*August: Osage County* was the most emotional of the shows for me because of how real it was. I didn't feel like I was in a theater watching a show, rather that someone had ripped away part of this house letting the audience peer in on someone's life. The acting was unparalleled. I lost my father this past year, and in the show when the police officer came in to tell the family that the father had died it was like reliving a personal nightmare. The eldest daughter Barbara's reaction was moment for moment my reaction. I was in shock watching the scene, and amazed afterwards that they had captured that moment of utmost horror so perfectly. From this moment on I watched the eldest daughter's journey and felt connected to her for the rest of the show. What this show was so eloquently able to do was show, after the death of the "head" of the family, the changes that happen. Roles re-shift and a new family dynamic is formed. The eldest daughter, even though she wasn't the closest when the father passed away, stepped in and took over. Watching her relationship with her sisters was interesting. None of them were truly happy, except the one breaking all the family norms by dating her cousin. Her character made me question what the role of the family was and what is expected from you as a part of the family. There is one part where the three sisters are talking, and Ivy says she and Karen are leaving, because they don't owe anything, and no one can point blame at her. Barbara argues that there is a responsibility to something greater than oneself.

The Native American girl, Johnna, was hired by the father who died later that week, yet she stayed because she had no family of her own. She is the most caring and loving one there,

yet she is not a part of the family. The mother Violet is a wreck, and does anything but "mother" the family. She is too drugged to know Wednesday from a potato. Her sister slept around with Beverly, and doesn't seem too preoccupied by his death, rather that her son was late. Again, her anger wasn't that her son was supposed to contribute something to the funeral; instead that it was his family responsibility to be there. But what responsibility did he in fact have to the family? If genes didn't connect them would there have been such a stigma for him being late to the funeral? The eldest daughter claimed it was her duty to stay and take care of the family, but in doing so she abandoned her own daughter and forsook her own happiness for someone, Violet, that didn't return any love.

Grief and pain did not bring a family together, even though they were physically connected for awhile in the house. Rather than becoming closer after the tragedy was "over," it tore them further apart. Karen decided to stay with her fiancé knowing that he attacked his niece. Ivy abandoned her mother to run off with her "brother/cousin," and the eldest daughter Barbara lost her family in attempts to keep everyone together.

A sense of loss is evident throughout the show, but it is described perfectly in the ending scene with Johnna and Violet. Johnna sang "this is the way the world end" in the rhythm of "The wheels on the bus go round and round," and Violet muttered, "And then you're gone Beverly, and then you're gone Barbara, and then you're gone, and then you're gone," and kept repeating those words till the fade to black. The loss is profound, through losing her husband, she has lost the rest of her family as well, and is now losing herself into madness.

-Julie Eaton (Class of 2009 Political Science)

**William Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night* (1600) Dir. Michael Grandage. Wyndham's Theatre**



I had a similar experience at the Donmar Warehouse's production of *Twelfth Night* as I did at the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Hamlet* in that I had studied the play, but I had never seen a production of it. As Professor Russ McDonald discussed, *Twelfth Night* is a play about contrasts. In this production, I particularly noticed how director Michael Grandage provided contrasts in shaping the world of Illyria, presenting the character of Malvolio, and staging the final scene. He also made effective use of the actor's physicality in his staging. One aspect of the production that I was surprised to see, but greatly enjoyed was how the world of Illyria and its characters gradually became more mad and festive. Sitting down to the production, I expected to immediately enter a world of insane festivity, but instead I entered a dark world that grew festive. I never expected that a production of *Twelfth Night* would begin with a shocking clap of thunder, and a dark stage. Additionally, I was surprised how Orsino's famous opening speech was staged and delivered to express anger and frustration, as opposed to the wistful romance that I always associated with that soliloquy. The next scene, in which Viola is washed up on the shore of Illyria, also took a dark tone. Victoria Hamilton as Viola, approached the scene with palpable desperation. It was not until the third scene when Sir Toby and Sir Andrew Aguecheek entered that the doors that dominated the back of the stage opened and light poured out onto the stage. When Maria, Sir Toby and Sir Aguecheek set up the letter for Malvolio to find, the doors completely came off stage. To me, the disappearance of the doors signified an entrance into complete madness and festivity. Later, when Malvolio was locked in the basement, the darkness signaled to me that festivity was at its end. Kent also used costumes to this effect. For example, when Olivia made her first entrance, her black dress great contrasted the light of the festive world that everyone else had engaged in, but after she met Cesario, she

changes into a beige outfit that blended in with her surroundings. These contrasts explicated how the characters slip into festivity as means of achieving their goals and desires.

I was curious how I would feel about Malvolio when finally seeing *Twelfth Night* live. Malvolio contrasted with the festivity in a way that made me sad to witness his downfall. Although his name means ‘ill- will,’ in this production, as played by Derek Jacobi, Malvolio did not seem to have ill will for the other characters, but rather a contrasting set of beliefs and standards. Although audiences and scholars have always viewed his intentions with Olivia as questionable, Jacobi presented his desires so earnestly and genuinely that I personally discarded the questionable nature. The scene in which Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew trick Malvolio with the fake letter from Olivia particularly stood out to me. *Twelfth Night* is often considered among the more farcical of Shakespeare’s plays. Having the three tricksters theatrically hide behind the curtain explicated this characteristic. The way that the audience heard the voices coming out of the curtain, the use of all sides of the curtain, and the way that the three characters would theatrically duck whenever Malvolio looked at them created a sense of ridiculousness, which contrasted with Jacobi’s genuine reaction of hope, thus making him more sympathetic. The staging of the scene in which Malvolio is locked in the basement and made to feel as though he has gone insane also solicited more sympathy for him. Grandage staged Maria and Sir Toby, so that they literally stood on top of Malvolio’s cage, explicating his downfall. However, the most effective image from that scene was when Feste did cartwheels over his cage, providing an image of festivity trumping decorum. Some classmates commented that in the final scene, Malvolio played up his misfortune, but I thought that from the previous scenes, it was understandable that he did so. I thought that the way he dragged out his exit showed hope that he

would find some form of redemption in his final moments onstage, which only garnered more sympathy from me.

Grandage effectively staged the final scene to provide a contrast between joy and despair. From reading *Twelfth Night*, I always viewed the final scene as being happy until the end when Feste sings his song, but throughout the final scene of this production, I rotated through feelings of happiness, and pity. Grandage emphasized that Antonio and Sir Andrew both wind up alone, by having them dejectedly and almost shamefully cross downstage by themselves while the happy couples have the privilege of exiting together.

Aside from providing contrasts, Grandage effectively used physical contact between characters to emphasize relationships. For example, both times that I read the play, I was always caught off guard by Sir Toby and Maria's marriage at the end, but their physical conflict throughout the play showed affection and made their marriage seem like a natural course of action, despite their difference in class. Additionally, there was a great deal of affection between Duke Orsino and Cesario, which created an interesting ambiguity. I played with the option in my head that perhaps Orsino was repressing homosexuality, which did not seem all that unlikely when in the final scene, he goes to Sebastian by accident instead of Viola, which was a comic and thought provoking directorial choice.

-Stephanie Schwartz (Class of 2011 English)

I really enjoy the way *Twelfth Night*, smattered with humor, intertwines opposites and actualizes impossibilities. This production in particular emphasized the play's contradictions and its multifarious nature. I also liked the way the set was constructed to look like the floor of a ship, which invokes the shipwreck Sebastian and Viola undergo before the play begins.

The most apparent stage of contradiction in *Twelfth Night* is with Sebastian and Viola. They are male and female, brother and sister, born from the same sphere of a womb. The two are so alike, that when Viola dons her Cesario costume, both brother and sister are thought to be the same person, and even after Viola reveals herself there is still some difficulty in distinguishing the two. At one point in this production after Viola is revealed and Orsino proposes his marriage to her, Orsino grabs Sebastian, thinking he is Viola, and tells him his feelings of amour. This mistake comments on Orsino's sudden decision to love a woman who was only just a man, Olivia's love for a woman, and also the twin's duplicity. I think that Shakespeare creates a pair of twins like this in order to comment on how truth is the amalgamation of everything, including opposites, and how, because of this, truth is not obvious, but it will eventually reveal itself.

There is also a comment on the permanence of death, which coming from Shakespeare connects with the renaissance idea that the poet is immortalized through his production of beautiful language, language that is passed on and examined throughout the rest of time. Watching *Twelfth Night* I felt as if I was communicating with the past because of the countless times this play has been performed. For 400 years this play has entertained audiences, all with the same plot and many of the same lines. Thus as *Twelfth Night* really lived under Shakespeare long ago, and figuratively died with him, it is still alive through its revivals. As far as death and life within the play, with the perceived death of Sebastian by Viola, he is actually alive through two means. One is through how Viola recreates him with uncanny similarity in Cesario, which in turn reduces the intensity of the sundering with her brother as she embodies him. She does it so that she does not lose a part of herself. She does it so she does not separate her completeness in a sphere of male and female twins. The second is how the dramatic irony associated with

Sebastian's survival enlightens the audience of his wellbeing and therefore he is alive through the audience.

Another contrast that is singular to this production is between Toby and Andrew. Both characters share an enjoyment for drunkenness, eating, sloth and mischief. They revel in the realm of mirth. However, it is clear that Toby is much more intelligent and cunning than Andrew, as the former clearly controls the direction of the pair's flow and is even able to trick him into fearing the feminine Cesario. The casting for this pair with a short Toby and a stretched ectomorph as Andrew, emphasizes the difference between these two characters that initially seem to be so similar.

The set's stage is made of weathered planks resembling a ship. Functionally, this works because it aptly serves as hardwood flooring in Olivia's house and the planks resemble a dock well for the beach scene. Most importantly though behind all of these sets, is the way the stage resembles a ship, namely Viola and Sebastian's destroyed ship of arrival. With the stage a ship, the play is set on something that rocks, sways and is unable to take a linear route to its destination, which is similar to the way the play unfolds with its humorous side plots mixed with the bulk of the story. A ship is also at the mercy of the elements, much as the characters of Olivia, Viola and Orsino are at the mercy of incontrovertible love. Even Sebastian seems powerless as he is charmingly swept into sex and marriage with Olivia. Additionally, the stage suggests the metaphorical shipwreck that may occur when Viola is revealed to Olivia, what may happen when Orsino discovers that Olivia loves Cesario or Antonio's possible execution in Orsino's territory.

However, like in *Hamlet*, my favorite part of this play was the way in which its performance completely transformed my mental vision of it. I knew that Toby and Andrew were

drunks and pranksters, but I had no idea how hilarious they were. Even the way other characters read simple lines contained such an accurate and complete reading of the text that made the performance remarkable. For example, Indira Varna did a wonderful job portraying Olivia's sexual desire for Cesario. This desire is especially apparent when she ecstatically exclaims, "Most wonderful," upon learning that there are two who look like Cesario (5.1.225). One reason why I really appreciate this course is because it makes Shakespeare's plays come alive; I had no idea.

-Adam Witzel (Class of 2010 English)

***Hansel and Gretel*. Dir. Dawn Reid. Written by Hope Massiah. Theatre Royal Stratford**

**East**

This was my first REAL, traditional pantomime! The New Wimbledon *Cinderella* was too busy with its cast to concentrate on being a pantomime, but this was the full experience of pantomime 101 for someone who *hasn't* grown up with it since the age of 18 months. The theatre was packed with different groups of children from elementary schools all over London, and this made for a wonderfully responsive audience to all the pantomime conventions of "Oh yes it is.. .Oh no it isn't!" In fact, the parents and teachers in the audience were just as responsive as the kids and looked like they were having the time of their life. Thus it was enjoyable to watch the action on stage as well as the reactions in the audience.

I noticed that each character had his or her own musical theme that repeated without fail when the character came back. I don't know if this is typical of all pantomimes to help children understand the nature of the character or better recognize the character or if this is unique to this particular composer, but I found it really effective. For example, Monty Mole always came out

from a hole in the ground and sang a happy, upbeat song: "Keep, 'em peeled for me,/Cuz Moles can't see." This was either sung by Monty and the audience or played as an instrumental when Monty came on the stage. The theme of the Irish landlord who was kind of evil but later still sympathetic as a parent was an Irish jig/reel, and the theme of the witch was full of the sounds of pipe organs and the theme, "The Wicked Wicked Witch of the Woods.. /She's so wicked, they named her twice."

An interest twist on the Hansel and Gretel story for this panto was the fact that the step-mother (who was a Dame and thus played by a man.. .but was also Jamaican for some reason) was actually a sympathetic character. She sang a blues song about how she had to work really hard when she was a kid and wanted to provide tough love for her kids, but eventually she recognized her error. Plus, she did not send them into the woods of her own will; she was brainwashed by the Wicked Wicked Witch! I suppose this helps kids reconcile the different levels of villainy/evil portrayed in this play: the Witch was just plain evil, but the landlord and stepmother, though mistaken in their ways, were ultimately just parents trying to do the best for their kids who they loved.

-Beverly Ferguson (Class of 2009 Eastman/English)

**T.S. Eliot. *Family Reunion* (1939). Dir. Jeremy Herrin. Donmar Warehouse**

I honestly had no idea what to expect from this play. I came in a little fearful that because it is a verse drama, it would be slightly avant-garde and hard to access, and even though the story was presented in an artistic way, I loved the way the family was represented and interestingly, like *Oedipus*, this show was extremely Aristotelian. Like many other plays we

have seen all week, I really felt a strong sense of searching for one's own identity through family in this play.

I noticed the following key points which made this feel like it was based off of Aristotle's posits: it was in verse, the plot was the most integral component; the idea of unity was overarching, as it all occurred in one place over the course of one day; not only the presence of the *Eumenedes*, but the idea that they were not hurting Harry, but were actually a message trying to lead him somewhere. All of these concepts were posited extremely cohesively in the show. The set itself and especially the murkiness of the lighting provided for an extremely eerie atmosphere, which gave me two distinct feelings. I felt at all times that a) something bad was always about to happen and b) no matter what there was no escape. This, I feel, was a manifestation of Harry's mind. He himself had such an air of paranoia about him and made me feel trapped because of how stifling his fear was. Because it was the manifestation of Harry's mind that was presented to us as the audience, Harry soon became the protagonist, as we could see what he saw.

Mary and Harry's relationship developed in a really interesting way. From the second he entered, there was tension. He brought the tension of his fear and of his anxiety, but a certain romantic and sexual tension existed between Harry and Mary that was exhibited in the way they talked to each other. They were wide eyed and interested, while they both barely paid any true attention to any of the other family. The story quickly began to focus in on Harry's search for self and the development of the possibility of Mary and Harry's romance. Because the elder family members acted also as the chorus, they took on the role as supporting narrators, rather than central characters. They provided us with the poetic asides, which allowed the story to revolve around Harry and Mary.



I mentioned briefly before the idea of Aristotelian unity, but I want to go a little further into that because it seemed really central to the whole play. Time itself was a mystery. Sand piles were building up on stage almost as though they were in a giant hourglass where only time passes, but walls surround them. It all took place in one room as well, and a very strong feeling of claustrophobia overtook me once Harry entered the room. It was the idea that there was something to fear outside the room that made me feel as if they could not get out. Harry made it very clear that he was not in the house relaxing, but was rather hiding, as he checked to see if the ghosts had followed him and insisted on closing the curtains. This entire show put me in the state of mind as the characters and that is what intrigued me. Interestingly, though the plot points are most central to the story, what pulled me into and then along for the ride was my alignment with the characters fears and emotions. When Harry was paranoid and fearful I was paranoid and fearful. When he was confused, I felt confused, and finally when he was relieved and enlightened in his epiphany, I felt relief as well, and the tension of claustrophobia lifted once he was finally able to “escape”.

-Mark Sobel (Class of 2010 Psychology)

***La Cage Aux Folles* (1983). Dir. Terry Johnson. Playhouse Theatre**

Like *No Man's Land*, *La Cage Aux Folles* brought into question the concept of something being real. It played with the concept of real family and what that constitutes. Is your family who you are born to? Is blood relation really the end all and be all of who you are? Or is family the people who raise you, who lay their potential lives aside to make sure you have all that you need?

Also like *No Man's Land*, *La Cage* explored the idea of if it is possible to truly know someone. With the character of Albin, one wonders who is the person, how far does the character of Zaza extend into Albin's life? I constantly found myself questioning emotions and intentions. The one thing I disliked about the musical was how it never truly established Albin/Zaza's initial unhappiness. Georges tries to pin it on Albin's declining stage presence, but I got the feeling that there was something more not being expressed.

*La Cage Aux Folles* also exhibited the recurring theme of things kept bidden, and things exposed. I quite enjoyed the fact that the play followed people whose lives are spent in what is essentially a disguise. I also like the transitions between being on stage and behind the scenes at the *La Cage Aux Folles* nightclub. It is interesting to follow the lives of actors, as theater is probably the ultimate form of disguise. Although we see and analyze these plays, within the performances are the characters and then the people who play them. The actors and actresses are not their characters at all, but by putting on makeup and costumes, they are able to camouflage themselves and make us believe they are. Ralph Fiennes was Oedipus, Patrick Stewart was Claudius, Michael Gambon was Hirst. The ultimate task of the actor, then, is to hide his or her true self from the audience and to present another different truth; Matt Rawle is not what is true, *Zorro* is. This task even extends beyond one human being acting as another. In the case of *War Horse*, not one but three actors were charged with the task of convincing the audience that together they comprise the soul of a horse and proceeded to project that soul through the actions and intents of their equine projections. In the case of *La Cage Aux Folles*, many of the actors are not just masquerading themselves as one character, but as two: their female counterpart, and their character for the show. Douglas Hodge was charged with the task of being Albin the man, Albin the woman, and Zaza the drag queen entertainer. Not only do these characters change their

images, but also by doing so change preconceived notions of what they are supposed to be. They no longer have to abide by stereotypically masculine ideals as represented by Monsieur Edouard Dindon the leader of the Tradition, Family and Morality Party. Nor do they have to follow the restraints imposed on women to highlight their femininity as exemplified by the timid Marie Dindon, Edouard's wife. As was stated in the beginning of the play by the Cagelles, "we are what we are and what we are is an illusion". This line applies not only to the drag queen persona, but to the actors themselves, not just of the play but of all plays.

-Dawn Batts (Class of 2010 Interdepartmental Program Arts & Sciences)

**Joe Sutton, *Complicit* (2008). Dir. Kevin Stacey. Old Vic Theatre**

In a post 9/11 world, is torture right? What do we owe our country as Americans? How much freedom of speech should we take advantage of? *Complicit* asks all of these questions but does not provide an answer.

Our main character, Ben faces these questions because he writes an article expressing his support of torturous means in acquiring information from people who are a threat to our country. However this may have been a factor in the precipitation of the attacks on the nation. He is brought to court and we see Ben, his wife, and his lawyer as they face this ordeal.

This play is interesting for many reasons other than just the story line. To see a play about America while in London is an interesting perspective. England is more socialized in certain political aspects than we are here and England can differ from the US on its opinions regarding foreign policy. Also, lately, many countries have been disapproving of the US on recent issues that have precipitated since 9/11.

What is particularly artistic about *Complicit* is that we get a raising of questions and issues seen through a citizen now targeted by the US government, but there is no final position taken. We also are mainly focused on the issue of torture, rather than getting into whether or not the Iraq war was justly started or other issues that have been recently associated with the Bush presidency.

On stage, we get some striking visuals from both the set and with certain scenes, a “prop”. The stage is itself a circle right in the center of the audience with two exits roughly 120 degrees apart. The floor is clear with TV screens scattered at different angles filling the floor. The edge of the stage is black with a changeable fluorescent ring of red or blue set inside that. There are also 3 TVs hanging from the ceiling. Not only does this arrangement of TVs allow from the audience, no matter where they are sitting, to see the images projected, but it also sets us in the US at the time shortly after the attacks. The abundance of TVs illustrates the media’s influence and how the images of 9/11 were everywhere, pervading the media and thus penetrating to nearly every citizen. We have clips of President Bush and interviews with our character Ben speaking about his book and his controversial claims for which he is now being prosecuted.

The “prop” on stage is one of the more powerful images we see; a man being tortured. We have a man in coveralls with a bag on his head, tied down by all his limbs to a board. This image is clearly an attempt to unsettle the audience. This also puts an image with the word torture—to make it real and mean something so as to make sure the word has not lost a meaning from overuse. At the end we see Ben as this prisoner when the bag is taken off the actor’s head. “Perhaps we should not be so squeamish” is one of the last lines we hear and this image of Ben is

the last image we see. Should we torture and be a little less squeamish or is it so wrong that we should not torture? And did this constitute torture?

This production is intriguing at another level outside the realm of the world on the stage, but in the world of the actors themselves as people. Since this was a premiere, the lines, staging, chemistry between neither the actors, nor every aspect of the story are solidified. We saw Richard Dreyfuss being fed lines at certain times. The chemistry between actors was lacking in parts as well likely due to the fact that it is hard to connect to your character and others if you can not remember what to say next. It is easy to see from this premiere that the show is attempts to become a hard hitting, somewhat unsettling, frightening drama to make people think deeply about America, torture, and what is right or wrong.

-Sarah Stelma (Class of 2009 Biological Sciences: Neuroscience)

Just as *Cinderella* was a fitting way to begin our immersion in London theater, *Complicit*, which takes us back across the pond to America, was an equally apt way to finish it. However, the two plays couldn't have been more different. *Complicit*, a thought-provoking drama concerning the ongoing debate over torture, was one of the most serious plays of the trip. Drama often serves as a brief, lighthearted respite from the complex difficulties of the real world. *Complicit*, however, shattered that illusion.

While theater is usually a politically liberal medium, as we saw in *Billy Elliot* and *La Cage aux Folles*, *Complicit* puts both sides of the torture debate on stage. It goes back and forth, presenting the major arguments both for and against torture. It felt like watching a debate; every time one side had begun to make a convincing argument, the other side countered with an equally well-prepared rebuttal. Although he was still refining his role, Richard Dreyfuss in the

leading part, with a paradoxical mixture of decisiveness and insecurity, brought this debate to life brilliantly.

The newly remodeled Old Vic theater has seats which circle entirely around the stage, and although our seats were in the back row, we had an excellent view of the production. The circular stage was inlaid with television sets. The multitude of televisions reflected the omnipresent, powerful influence of the American media. At the beginning of each scene, the screens depicted flashing sequences of images associated with national security and the events of 9/11, to recall the original impetus for our debates on torture and to elicit an emotional response. The televisions also occasionally flashed scenes of an interview of Dreyfuss's character, journalist Ben Kritzer, about an exposé of his on torture. The use of news footage gave the audience the perspective that the general public would learn about the story. It also proved a novel, contemporary method of introducing flashbacks.

The final scene presented a closing incontrovertible argument against torture. What if it happened to you? It depicts Ben Kritzer being water boarded by darkly clothed terrorists. The entire play seemed to be torture for Dreyfuss's character. He is placed in the horns of a terrible dilemma, where he must choose between sacrificing his ideals or his freedom. Dreyfuss, a tad on the melodramatic side, whined many of his lines, indicating intense frustration.

Watching a play preview was particularly interesting; it showed us the dramatic process in progress. Richard Dreyfuss flubbed several of his lines, requiring the stage manager to prompt him. The script often seemed to ramble. I wasn't sure whether the actors were ad libbing, trying to remember their lines, or if it was just a weakness of the dialogue.

-Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012 Chemistry)