

Journal

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Introduction

This journal is designed to be both objective and subjective at the same time. The focus of each entry is what I felt the *Director's vision* for each particular show, was regardless of the previous histories of representation; the focus is on just the specific versions of the shows we have seen. Once laying out what I believe this vision to be, which is essentially my thesis, I then look at the various aspects of the show which contribute to or detract from the stated vision and goal for each production. Each entry is divided into four parts, the first three of which are meant to be object and thus written in a more academic matter, and last fourth meant to be subjective and thus written slightly less formally. These four parts are as follows:

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: In this section I briefly lay out and define what I feel the Director's vision for the show, and what overall message the show was trying to deliver; essentially, what was the *goal* of the show itself.

Setting: In the setting section I focus on the various sets, props, chronological placement (time in history in which show takes places), lighting, sound, music and even the actual theatre itself, to see how these physical aspects of the show contribute to the overall goal and vision of the show.

Audience and Intention: Here I focus on two things. Firstly, who is this show designed for? Adults, children, or both? A certain nationality perhaps?

Secondly, I focus on the actor's performance, their stage directions, and the overall presenting of the play, to see how this contributes to the overall vision and goal of the show.

Personal Musings: This is where I stop being objective and merely offer my own little commentaries on things that I enjoyed, disliked, or any other musing regarding the show I may think of.

At the end of the journal is a short summary which attempts to link all the shows together.

Cinderella – New Wimbledon Theater, 12/29/2008

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: *Cinderella* was a musical pantomime which, though principally geared towards children, also catered to adults. *The director's vision was to take the age-old story of Cinderella and make it quintessentially English*, via the actual dialogue itself and certain stylistic tropes historically present in the English arts. There were also many interesting decisions to break the fourth wall, in the form of the ventriloquist, but again, also with the dialogue.

Setting: The New Wimbledon Theater venue was perfect for the show: lots of open space for a large audience, also allowing for the focal point to be the entire stage itself. In other words, the theater was great for a *spectacle*, which *Cinderella* certainly was: large musical routines, a large cast, dancing, singing (particularly of many songs which are already famous and recognizable from the pop world), larger than life costumes, and special props (the carriage drawn by actually mini-horses obviously being the show-stealer).

The actual scenery itself was nothing special: mainly painted backdrops and not many props, even for the Prince's ballroom. Possibly this is Pantomime tradition? Or possibly it's because the main audience is children, who probably do not care too much about backdrop, as long as the acting is engaging.

Audience and Intention: The show was, in essence, a children's show. The back-and-forth shouting between the audience and the actors is engaging to children, thus keeping them involved. The acting, particularly on the part of the Fairy Godmother and Cinderella, was also geared towards keeping the children engaged via antiphony, and through over-stated emotions and gestures. The ventriloquist also filled the role of entertaining the children with his use of puppets, and the two Ugly Step-Sister's did the same with their outrageous costumes and antics. However, there many parts of the show meant for adults as well. Many of the jokes from both the Ventriloquist (particularly his audience interaction pieces) and the Step-Sisters were of a sexual nature which would only truly be understood by adults. The Step-Father also acted in this manner much of the time. Hence, while the story remained "innocent" for the children, there was enough adult humor present to keep the older crowd (myself included) engaged and entertained.

However, by far the largest audience being targeted (and the main part of the Director's vision) was the British themselves. This is evidenced in all manner of ways. Take for instance the character of Baron Hardup. From the very beginning of the show, when he and Cinderella temporarily break character to make fun of the differences between English and Welsh accents, Baron Hardup is cast as a kind of tie in with modern Britain itself, offering humor which many non-Brits might not understand. His numerous impersonations were hysterical, though I freely admit that I'd only actually heard of one or two of the celebrities being spoofed. The actor and Director's take on the character reminded me very much of the Gatekeeper character in *Macbeth*:

a pliable character meant to interject current events and modern humor into a show. There were also numerous stylistic tropes used to tie the viewer in with the unique traditions of British theater. For instance, the two Step-Sisters in outrageous drag go all the way back to the days of Gilbert and Sullivan (later taken to new heights by Monty Python). The scene in which the car breaks down and the actors utilize fast repetition harkens back to a unique form of British vaudeville-ism which predates even the drag. The antiphony between the crowd and stage, while not that different from the American antiphony of my own children, utilizes different phrases which I'm sure become ingrained in the children themselves.

The program for the play stresses how many versions of the Cinderella story there are, briefly describing the Italian, Egyptian, and Romanian versions. This is meant to attune the audience to the fact that *this is a uniquely British version of the story*. *The Director's goal was to create a uniquely British version of a universal story*, and I personally feel he accomplished this task.

Personal Musings: I am a huge fan of Joanna Page's work (Cinderella), though I had never matched the name to the face until now. She is the perfect representation of innocence, which is paramount for the character. Indeed, in the film *Love Actually*, she plays a pornographic film actor, though manages to be the most innocent person in the film. Her role in *From Hell* is the same, though in that film her innocence is not only lost but completely annihilated. Hence, I thought the Director's choice of placing her in the lead role was a great one, because she did a fantastic job. Not really a singer, but it did not matter.

I was not impressed at all by Garreth Gates (The Prince), who I felt not only couldn't act his way out of paper bag, but also could not sing very well! And he had a number one album in the UK! There were times when he could have cut loose vocally and really impressed, but all I ever felt was let down. He also wasn't loud enough, which one should learn in Acting 101. In other words, he did not impress me.

I love the way the fourth wall was constantly being broken, especially by the Step-Father, Step-Sisters, and Buttons. It completely blurred the line between audience and stage, which was both fun and interesting. While every character did this through antiphony, it was the ventriloquism, interacting with "Hugh the Boyfriend", and impersonations which truly engaged me. I also loved the reference one of the sisters gave to Cinderella by saying "love, no wait, *love actually*", thus teasing Joanna Page about her own work outside of the character and show.

I must say, I thoroughly enjoyed myself!

No Man's Land – Duke of York's Theater, 12/29/2008

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: I believe that the Director's vision was to *create a space in which the characters of Spooner, Foster, and Briggs were meant to represent different self-imagined aspects of Hirst's own persona*. He is able to imagine these personae due to the fact that he is in a self-imposed "No Man's Land", in which he remains due to his avoidance of light and time, and the constant haze of alcohol.

Setting: The Theater itself was gorgeous, and though multi-tiered, was still intimate, as even the farthest seats were close to the stage, which was necessary for this show. The stage itself, though I did not realize it at the time, was on a tilt, thus allowing the back of the stage where the elaborate bar stood to be seen clearer, as well as the bookcase. The bar itself was integral to the theme; it might as well have been a character itself. The bar needed to be prominently displayed, because it contained the alcohol which provided the physical haziness that constituted No Man's Land. The fact that it is *willingly* consumed is paramount.

What needs to be mentioned is the lighting, which was brilliantly done, especially with the shades on stage left. The light, along with the alcohol, is the other key physical element which constitutes No Man's Land. The *willingness* to shut out the light, particularly at the very end of Act I and towards the end of Act II, are also key aspects of this self-imposed exile on the part of the writer.

The alcohol and the light, both of which constitute the majority of the set, are also the two tools most prominently used to create the No Man's Land. Therefore their representation within the set was well-deserved and expertly done.

Audience and Intention: The show is obviously meant for adults; not just that, but adults who are willing to think abstractly.

Hirst is a character who has relegated himself to the proverbial No Man's Land via his drinking and refusal to address the world outside of his house, including the day itself. Initially, we are led to believe that the character of Spooner is an actual person [Note: This can still be true; this is just my interpretation of a very open-ended show]. However, as the show goes on, it becomes obvious that Spooner is actually the *representation of how Hirst views himself*. Spooner is a poet, who though experienced and talented, has now fallen on hard times. He cannot seem to make due. Spooner, who for most of the play keeps his composure, loses it at the end. The speech at the end of the show, his long, desperate plea to Hirst, is essentially Hirst's creative subconscious pleading with him to be set free once again, ultimately to no avail. Since Hirst was/is an artist who uses words, his creative side is obviously his most important, hence Spooner's presence on the stage for the entirety of the show.

The two side characters also represent suppressed aspects of Hirst's personality. Foster represents the poetical and romantic wanderlust of an artist. He is hyper-sexualized, always referring to wild sexual encounters with foreign women. He is so sexualized that there are

almost homo-erotic moments in his initial engagements with Spooner. His constant speeches about foreign lands offer the exact opposite of No Man's Land: exotic locations to roam, explore, and savor. Even his costuming, with his bright red shirt, speaks of a romanticized existence full of life, exuberance, and inspiration. His lament at the end of the play, "I didn't need to come back," hints at the fact that Hirst's isolation is self-imposed.

Briggs, on the other hand, represents the down-to-earth, masculine, *practical* side of Hirst's personality. He is not the romantic side of an artist, but the practical side which keeps one's feet rooted in reality. His speech to Spooner in which he describes giving directions to Hirst is indicative of a *connection* to a *home*, not Hirst's self-imposed No Man's Land. His hyper-masculine nature represents brute strength and self control: two things utterly lacking in Hirst now, who is in a powerless state and powerless to control/help himself. Once again, the costuming, particularly his sleeveless shirt and leather gloves, suggest a masculinity, that when paired with the almost-feminine nature of Foster, create two opposite yet necessary parts of Hirst's personality. Yet though present, they are unable to help Hirst break out of No Man's Land (a claim actually leveled against them by Spooner).

Ultimately, the play ends in a tragedy, where Hirst ignores the artist within himself (Spooner), his poetical wanderlust (Foster), or his practicality and connection to home (Briggs), and remains in his self-imposed No Man's Land.

Personal Musings: I had no idea that the actors we were seeing in this show were the various faces I had seen on the TV and big screen. Though I appreciate the work of Michael Gambon and David Bradley, I was truly blown away by the fact that I was able to see David Walliams, who I find to be a genius comedy writer and actor in his TV show *Little Britain*. So that was a wonderful surprise and treat for me. Even more so, seeing that he can act seriously as well. I found that much of Pinter's dialogue reminded me of Melville's Moby Dick in the way that within huge passages there will be literal gems of phrases; phrases that stay with you the rest of your life due to their power. They also serve as great song titles! These phrases also work well in this show, because the dialogue is meant to be "boring" much of the time, but it deceptively is not, as these sudden phrases/musings act like a shock to the viewer, immediately drawing attention to the speaker again. Much like Haydn's symphony!

I love shows in which much of the interpretation is left to the viewer. In the audience, it was interesting to see that different people laughed at different times. At the end, during Foster's final speech, many people laughed and thought this event funny, while I found it a heartbreaking and desperate last attempt for help. One interpretation is not better than the other obviously, but a play which acts as a half-completed canvass upon which the viewer can fill in the rest is always my favorite kind of show.

War Horse – Olivier Theatre, 12/30/2008

Overall Synopsis and Director’s Vision: This interpretation is a study on the idea of “brotherhood”, with brotherhood abstractly meaning the relationships between individuals of both sexes, humans and animals, and humanity itself (in this case represented in the form of the countries battling in World War I). This abstraction of the term “brotherhood” is supported artistically by the Director’s abstract representation, as evidenced by the sets, props, and physical choices made. Also, the idea that from hostility can spring eventual peace is also paramount.

Setting: Even though *War Horse* will be moving to the West End soon, it is very hard to imagine the show taking place anywhere other than the National Theatre’s Olivier Theatre. Firstly and most importantly, there was full utilization of the massive stage in an effort to place a huge emphasis on *space*. While the stage itself is huge, it was also sparsely furnished in terms of set; the only constant backdrop was the elevated LED screen in the form of a ripped piece of paper; the largest actual set pieces wheeled into the state were only basic doorways. This ties in with the romanticized version of the horse itself: a large range within which to run free. This sense of space is immediately reinforced in one of the first scenes of the show via juxtaposition, when the Joey the colt is penned in by men holding little gates. This sense of open space is also key later in the show, as it is able to provide more than enough room for imagined battlefields, marching grounds, and yards. In other words, to quote Antoine de Saint-Exupery: “Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.”

Audience and Interpretation: The audience for this show is meant to be universal, i.e. all ages. While the the human/animal connection shown between the actors and puppets (particularly with the little French girl) are enough to keep children engaged, the larger themes of WWI, inter-family conflict, and the philosophy of brotherhood are there for the adults. The props (one could even say characters) of Joey and Tophorn are amazing to all, and many of the stage effects, including the rising of the columns and stage, gunshots, smoke, and entrance of a tank, are impressive to all.

The theme of brotherhood is stressed via numerous interactions between a plethora of characters. However, we are exposed to both sides of the coin: both the positive and negative consequences of the condition. Our first real encounter with the theme is in the stressed relationship between the brothers Ted and Arthur Narracot, which is hostile and stressed. But if one looks at this relationship a little bit closer, we are able to find a metaphor pertaining to the entire play itself. The bidding war over Joey the colt, which is a hostile event, ultimately leads to the introduction of Joey into Albert Narracot’s life: from hostility springs good. Additionally, when Billy and Arthur place a rather sinister bet that Joey can be taught to plow, we see another positive come from a negative: because of the negative bet and subsequent plowing experience, Joey is then able to show Tophorn how to wear the hauling straps while pulling the German cannon, thus saving the horse's life.

Brotherhood between humans and animals is the most obvious form shown in *War Horse*, most notably between Albert and Joey. However, it is also evidence by the relationship of Hauptman Friedrich Muller when he finds both Joey and Tophorn, as well as the little French girl and the animals. And while the relationship between Joey and Albert is the driving plot behind the play, I felt that it was the relationship between the two horses and Muller which best evidenced the symbiotic animal/human relationship. As Muller is about to commit suicide, Joey gives him the idea to change his identity, thus saving his life. For the rest of the show, Muller makes it his responsibility to make sure both Joey and Tophorn are protected, even stepping between a loaded gun and Joey. So once again, we have an example of hostility leading to peace: two captured enemy horses end up in a symbiotic life-saving friendship with a German officer. Additionally, it is this horse/human relationship which leads to the friendship between Muller and the French daughter/mother. Occupying force and occupied civilians becoming friends: from hostility to peace.

The animal/animal brotherhood is shown with the relationship between Joey and Tophorn. In a scene that is supported by the aforementioned large amounts of space on the stage, both horses initially fight with each other. However, after a violent exchange, they eventually become comfortable each other, until they finally (literally) become inseparable until the death of Tophorn. Yet again, we see peace spring from hostility.

Finally, we have the relationship between the combating sides in WWI as a whole. Neither side is represented as “right”; the Kaiser’s forces, particularly in the form of the war-shocked pathological German soldier, are painted as rather barbaric. However, the English are painted as ignorant and full of hubris to the point of fatality: not comprehending the true reasons for the war, mindlessly and needlessly charging wave after wave of soldiers and horses into enemy machine guns etc. Both sides are shown to be at fault. However, this is all “resolved” (at least within the show) when the two opposing trenches offer up a temporary cease-fire in which to decide how and who will rescue Joey from the barbed wire. Even with guns temporarily firing, the German and English soldiers are literally laughing with each other when they flip a coin over who will take the horse. This reminiscent of the true story of the Christmas Eve soccer match in no man’s land during Christmas Eve. Hence, we see more hostility giving birth to peace. What’s more, we are shown the absolute pointless/fruitless nature of WWI, when the English soldiers act as though they had won a gargantuan battle, if not the war itself, by the mere acquisition of the horse. Thinking relatively, when an event such as that calls for jubilation, how terrible must everything around them truly be? The answer is absolutely horrible.

Thus, one can see that *War Horse* is really a story about the brotherhood of all things, and that throughout the various clashes between entities, if true brotherhood exists, things will ultimately resolve themselves to peace.

Personal Musings: This is the first show we have seen in which I wanted to cry. For the sake of manly vanity I held it back, but I truly do not ever remember crying at a show before, or even wanting to. I was not struck emotionally by the relationship of Albert and Joey; I found it almost

a tad ridiculous. But I found the other relationships in the show, particularly via the character of Muller, to be quite touching. Muller represented to me a man at his lowest point; when one has seen and experienced so much, how can one remain human? There is a Hunter S. Thompson quote: “He who makes a beast out of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.” Muller could have taken the “beast” road, as his homicidal German partner did, or indeed just ended his life, but he choose humanity instead however hard that was: changing his indemnity by literally saying to an officer that “Muller” was dead (the most heart-wrenching scene). He reached out with kindness to the French family, when we just as easily could have vented his rage in all sorts of terrible ways. He found what little good he could, in the form of the horses, and held onto it, gave it every bit of love he had, until his ultimate death. He chose to rebuild himself, the harder road, rather than let his humanity be destroyed, which was incredibly inspiring to me.

I also loved the character of Rose Narracot. I felt her speech to Albert about his father was integral for the entire show, and can be extrapolated onto both sides of the actual WWI conflict. While not making any excuses for the vices and flaws in her husband, she also explains the motivations for and catalysts behind his flaws, while also pointing out the good in him. This is exactly what is done in the show with the representation of both the English and the Germans: they are show positively and negatively, with the individual underlying motivations laid out clearly to the view. As an Anthropology major, this aspect proved particularly appealing to me.

My other major is Japanese; I have done much work on, and seen many productions of, traditional *bunraku* theater productions, which involve the stylized use of intricate puppets. I found the comparison between Japanese bunraku puppetry and the amazing puppetry in *War Horse* to be fascinating. In bunraku, the puppeteers are dressed entirely in black, with the exception of the lead puppeteer; however, there is no attempt to conceal the puppeteer. The puppeteer is view as simply that: a puppeteer, who has no actual relation to the stow, plot, and especially to the puppet he controls. He is essentially part of set. However, in *War Horse*, the puppeteers we seen as *part of* the horse itself: dressed in the same colors, making all of the horse noises, and reaction to outside elements which affect the horse. This is especially evident when one of the support horses dies, and the puppeteers fall out of the horse as though they themselves have also been killed. It’s as though the puppeteers were the *soul* of the horse. This made for a great comparison with my own research into bunraku!

Gethsemane – Cottesloe Theatre, 12/30/2008

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: *Gethsemane* offers a window into the lives of those involved in British politics. However, the realm of British politics is an arbitrary (yet interesting and relevant) location chosen for what are two universal themes: those of persistence and doubt. While the biblical Gethsemane references a moment of doubt on a path of "good," the show *Gethsemane*, through its several characters, shows people at different points in the process: those persisting is what they see as "right" despite doubt, those persisting in what they see as "wrong" despite doubt, and those who chose not to persist at all due to their doubt. By offering varying examples of the Gethsemane theme, the play manages to create characters which are distinctly *human*, with no heroes or anti-heroes to speak of (I know I disagree with many of my classmates in this regard). Simply put, a case study in persistence and doubt, set against the backdrop of British politics.

Setting: The set of the show perfectly suited the thematic location: the sheik modern London of both Westminster and The City. The clean lines and white/black motifs of the set and set pieces truly made one think of an expensive nightclub, high-end apartment, or powerful office. Also, the backdrop upon which racing visions of a busy London city, from both the ground and air, proved very effective at providing the sense of a chaotic world of which the characters were trying to make sense. The minimalism of the set made the backdrop videos stand out that much more.

Audience and Intention: At first, it might seem that the audience for this show would be a British adult, considering the fact that the whole play is set against the backdrop of British politics. However, for an adult unfamiliar with British politics, nothing should be lost in viewing. While certain references are made, they are not integral to the plot in any way (I do follow British politics in earnest so feel I can safely say this). Once again, British politics are only an arbitrary backdrop to the true theme of the show, hence the audience for this should be any adult, regardless of nationality.

Let us examine a few of these varying instances of doubt. First, look at the character of Prime Minister Benzine, who plays a rather minor role yet offers a large example. Despite his own doubts about the political system in which he operates, he still feels that the way he goes about running the country is right. Despite corruption and influence from the likes of people such as Otto Fallon, he still believes that what he is doing is generally "right." Sure, he has doubts, which are expressed during his single scene with Meredith, but he still persists. Despite his doubts, he keeps doing what he believes is *right*.

But now consider the character of Meredith: she realizes all too well the rampant corruption of the government. She knows that her husband is guilty of very shady dealings in post-communist countries. And she also knows that she is unable to relate to her teenage

daughter, Suzette, due to the fact that Meredith is always too busy working. Yet, despite all of these doubts, and knowing the rather dire consequences, Meredith continues to play the political game, chooses to remain by her husband's side, and essentially relinquishes control of her daughter to Lori. Despite her own doubts, Meredith persists in what she knows is *wrong*.

And then we come to the character of Lori herself. As is pointed out by Suzette, we see that Lori never really had her moment of Gethsemane: while she had her doubts, she dropped out. Lori is able to help others with their own situations, yet when it comes to hers, she is relatively powerless: she is afraid to truly pursue her music, or continue with teaching, or even to divorce her husband. In Lori, we are presented with a character who is *ruled by* doubts, thus going wherever those doubts lead her. She is useful to others, but cannot help herself because she cannot address her own doubts: she cannot have her Gethsemane.

It is also worth mentioning that we are presented with characters who are completely removed from the concept of doubt. There are Frank the butler, Monique the secretary, and of course, Otto Fallon. These people have absolutely no doubt about what they do; they merely do it. In this way though, they are presented as not really human beings in a way. They have removed themselves from one of the basic human instincts, to doubt. Whether this is better or worse than those who doubt is up for debate, but it definitely deprives them of a basic tenant of their humanity.

Personal Musing: Once again, I was pleasantly surprised, when I saw that the woman playing Lori, Nicola Walker, plays the character of Ruth on one of my favorite British TV shows, *MI:5*. So that was a real treat for me!

I very much enjoyed the realism of the show, from the whole sleek urbanized metropolitan set to the way that all of characters seemed so human: every single one of them had good and bad aspects to their personalities. Therefore, I felt the show was extremely believable, and could personally relate to many of the different situations faced by the characters. And even while dealing with British politics, it managed to touch on many different worlds as well: that of the up-and-coming middle class worker; that of the rebellious and troubled teenager; that of the high government official; that of the failed musician; that of the mindless employee who does nothing but work. All of these different realities were dealt with, and many of them indeed collided with each other.

Gethsemane is probably the most humanizing part of the New Testament, making Jesus seem more like a mortal man more than anywhere else. This play is perfectly titled, because it paints a portrait of people who are *human*—flaws and all.

Hamlet – Novello Theatre, 12/31/2008

[Note: Before I can say anything about this show, I must admit my severe bias in this instance. From the age of five all the way through the end of my Senior Year of High School, I was an actor. In my final play Senior Year, I had the honor of playing the role of Hamlet. The experience truly changed my life. However, afterwards, since I felt it couldn't get better any than that, I stopped acting altogether. I have done no acting in college, and indeed this class represents my first hesitant steps back into the world of theater. And since *Hamlet* holds such an important place in my heart, it will be hard for me to be objective, but I will give it my best.]

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: I believe the Director's goal with his interpretation of *Hamlet* was to place a severe emphasis on *self-reflection*. This was achieved through both the set and the stage direction, particularly via stationary contemplation as opposed to movement during monologues and dialogues alike.

Setting: The actual stage for the show was certainly set up to represent the whole notion of self-reflection, with the backdrop being entirely composed of revolving glass mirrors. This did add some extra dimensions to certain scenes as well, most noticeable during the "coronation" and "play within a play" scenes, and successfully gave the illusion of more people being actually on the stage than there actually were. When Polonius is shot, a large crack in the back mirrors appears, representing the gunshot, but so much more as well: the giant crack remains for the rest of the show, because the exact moment in time when it appeared represented the point of no return for Hamlet himself. The death of Polonius was portrayed as the beginning of the end, mainly through these well utilized mirrors.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show is probably strictly adults. The emphasis on self-reflection was made very obvious by the fact that so many of the monologues were delivered very straight – meaning that there was little to no movement. This was meant to symbolize the very thought process running through the character's head, and the lines are thus meant to mean more than just something which is said. The character's are interacting *within* themselves, as opposed to expressing themselves outwardly through movement.

Personal Musings: I know its incredibly easy to pick on the "new guy", but I have some major qualms which need to be said. I was incredibly disappointed that David Tennet was not playing Hamlet as I'm sure many were. However, I was of course willing to give this show its fair chance, even minus the mighty Dr. Who. I can honestly say that this is the first show we viewed which I was not only unimpressed by, but actively disliked. My reasons are numerous, and I will try to keep from merely becoming a critic.

First of all, it was obvious that many of the Directorial stage directions were designed to fit Tennet perfectly. There was no way to avoid this for Edward Bennet. However, I felt like I was watching Bennet trying to play *Tennet's* version of the Hamlet character. Obviously, Bennet has not had much time to develop his own version of the character: I felt like his Hamlet was unbelievably loony, if not outright ridiculous at times. His emotional arc was too manic, even for someone who is descending into a misanthropic avenging madness. Instead of changing from raging to whimsical in the space of a scene or line once or twice, I felt he did it quite too much within just about every scene.

And on the topic of emotion, I felt it to be totally lacking from most of the show, and when present, it was clichéd. If I had a dollar for every time Hamlet got down on his knees and bent forward with his hands on his head....But events such as the “Get thee to a nunnery” scene and the final swordfight, I felt were devoid of any strong emotion; I was especially disappointed about the utter lack of connection between Hamlet and Ophelia. Though I worship Patrick Stewart, I felt that his Claudius was completely lacking any sinister element; I felt no evil whatsoever. Laertes (though in the same position as Bennet since Bennet originally played the part) did not move me; I did not feel his rage in the least. And the fighting! Over Ophelia’s grave and during the final battle, it looked like high school fight choreography (I would know!).

On that note, Polonius stole the show! And that’s bad! There are hilarious parts of Hamlet, in the traditional sense and in the more mentally disturbed sense, but I felt as though I was watching a comedy more than a tragedy. Instead of seeing someone slowly lose their mind, I saw Hamlet cracking jokes like he was in a Las Vegas lounge. Comedy is good (also necessary and present in all Shakespeare’s tragedies), but only if it acts as a *relief* for the audience from the intensity of the drama unfolding onstage. This was Polonius’ show, with Hamlet acting as the Abbot to his Costello (wow, I’m getting harsh here....)

Most of all, the “self-contemplation” aspect of the show made for too many absolutely motionless monologues. Mind you, if one does anything other than stand still for “To be or not to be...” and “What a piece of work is man...” then one is committing an act of sacrilege. But I felt there should have been much more movement on the part of Hamlet and Claudius alike. More movement, more emotion, more feeling.

I was not drawn in, and related to none of the characters. I was not moved by anyone’s performance, with the exception of Gertrude, the Gravedigger, and Polonius (who in my mind was even a little *too* ridiculous). All in all, I think that the Director’s vision was an interesting one, which could have worked, but it was not properly executed by the actors onstage and the Direction offstage. I am so sad I say that I was thoroughly disappointed by *Hamlet*. Oh well, can’t win them all!

Loot – Tricycle Theatre, 1/2/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision of the Director was essentially to remain true to Joe Orton's witty yet socially relevant script. Through staging the black comedy in its original time, which the social satire's remaining unaltered, the Director did a huge service in highlighting the genius of the script itself, since the issues discussed are just as relevant today as they were in 1966. The farcical elements hint at the comedic revolution which was to grab Britain in the subsequent years. In other words, the show focused on two main themes: *satire* and *farce*.

Setting: The Tricycle Theatre seemed to be created in order to stage farces: the theater itself has a whimsical quality, from the fold-out bench setting to the red construction-site like bleachers. Also, one of the requirements for a good farce is an intimate setting where the actors are not far away from the audience.

The stage itself, once again in classic farce trope tradition, is a single space, in this case a living room, into which there are multiple exits and entrances. This allows the focus to remain on the actors and (especially in *Loot*) the props. A simple constructed backdrop with a few key props, including the coffin, the "mummy", the bed, and the cupboard.

In terms of time, the decision to keep the show in its original year was a smart one. As will be discussed in a minute, the social commentary being made through the satire is timeless, therefore no changes need to be made in order to hammer the points home any further.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show is definitely adults, as the social and sexual topics being discussed would go over the heads of children and adolescents. And while the show was written for a British audience, anyone with any understanding of the topics discussed in the play (religion, authority, etc.) can appreciate it. So while geared towards the British, the show once again transcends its barriers and deals with themes that can appeal to those of any nationality.

The satire and farce aspects of the show were obvious within all the actions: lies building upon lies building upon lies, until they all come crashing down at the end, when the money spills everywhere. Sudden entrances and exits, rapid movements which are often motivated by desperation, and of course, always the need to conceal something, both in intention and also physically. This time, the main thing to be concealed is a dead body! Dark indeed, yet still funny. We see the British police force satirized for their incompetency; the pious satirized for their ridiculous adherence to traditions (note that these are *Irish Catholics* being made fun of); the young satirized as being just plain stupid.

Thus, we have all the elements for farcical satire.

Personal Musings: I very much enjoyed this show. Farces hold a special place in my heart, since I had roles in three throughout high school. *Loot* reminded me tremendously of the world of Neil Simon, who I consider to be the ultimate master of the farce.

It is very evident how shows like *Loot* inspired young British writers and actors of that time period; one needs look no further than Monty Python. I found it very telling that during our class discussion somebody mentioned John Cleese. Though I enjoy Python, I think that John Cleese's post-Python TV show *Faulty Tower* is probably the greatest television show of all time. Every single episode is a farce, with one event building upon another (usually in the form of lies), until at the end everything collapses. The episode I am thinking of in particular is called "The Dead Body", in which events drawn almost exactly from *Loot* take place; there is no doubt in my mind that *Loot* much have inspired that episode.

My only complaint about *Loot*, and it is a minor one, was the awkward homosexual element between Hal and Dennis. On stage, this is was not very well acted out, so at best it remained confusing. But I think that their probably is no way to act that out properly, because it just doesn't quite make sense within the script. There is no reason for it; mind you there isn't a reason *not* to include it, but I have a sneaking suspicion that this subplot was simply Joe Orton inserting aspect of his own personal life into the show. This is usually not a bad thing, but when those aspects do not really make sense within or add to the show, they serve as a detractor.

On the whole (and in contrast to many of my classmates), felt that the show was a well acted farce/satire which I thoroughly enjoyed. I was impressed by the satire, but most importantly, I was entertained: the point of farce to begin with.

A Little Night Music – Menier Chocolate Factory Theater, 1/2/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director’s Vision: The Director’s vision for *A Little Night Music* was to remain as close to the original script as possible in both setting and character, but while also placing a strong yet subtle emphasis on the theme of *time*. While most productions put the stress on love, the stress on time was both evocative and entertaining, not to mention perfectly executed.

Setting: The theater (a quirky one to say the least) was *perfect* for the staging of this performance: small and intimate. Just as is happening with most Sondheim productions these days, the orchestra was paired down, as is the set itself, and the shows are meant for a smaller audience; I find this to be a great development.

The set itself, while not minimalistic by any means, was simple enough to not take away from the props and costumes. The show was performed in its original setting, turn of the century Sweden, thus the costumes and set were fitting. The irony of the adult costumes in the second act, with everyone dressed in white (the color of purity and innocence), was a great addition to the show, and helped stress the ridiculous nature of the affairs at hand, since everyone had their own schemes.

A particular note which deserves mentioning was the lighting utilized during “Send in the Clowns.” Even though Frederic’s lines in the song, the lighting stayed firmly on Desiree, which actually takes the viewer inside the mind of Desiree herself: the focus on her own internal disappointment, so strong that it cuts out any vestige of the outside world. In a show that stresses twilight and night so much, I felt that the subtleties of the lighting were wonderful.

Audience and Intention: I believe the audience for this show to be adults, but I think that children could also enjoy it as well. While some of the main themes might escape them, the action and the music itself is certainly engaging enough itself to keep one’s attention.

The real underlying theme of this show is *time*: time as relating to generational gaps, time as referring *carpe diem*, and time as referring to nostalgia. I thought that a particularly clever device utilized to stress the theme of time came in the form of the circular waltzing at both the beginning and the end of the show, which resembled the ticking of a clock; an especially wonderful device when used at the end around the deceased Grandmother.

Every character in the play was struggling in their own unique battles with time. Anne, for instance, is being pushed into an older generational arena when she should still be in the middle of young adult freedom. Desiree is trying to hang on to a youth which she increasingly sees passing her by (and which can be remedied through her relationship with Fredrick). The dragoon’s wife, every single day, can feel time eroding her spirit down to an emotionless vacuum, due to her husband’s treatment of her. Petra the maid feels that she is caught in time itself: though she is free sexually, it is only through sex itself that she is able to transcend any of

the class boundaries she was born into, and since sex is fleeting, she's trapped. These are only a few of the struggles present, since almost everyone in the show faces them.

There are also some very interesting juxtapositions around the theme of time. While all of the main "adult" characters are engaging in wild plots, sneaky motives, and crazy affairs, it appears that the "children" (minus Anne) and the Grandmother are the wisest characters in the show. Heinrich makes his speech during dinner scolding the whole lot of adults, while he himself is really just as conflicted as they are. However, it is Frederica who is constantly saving situations due to her intelligence and wits: whether it be helping to distract the Dragoon or to look for Heinrich with Anne (thus saving Heinrich's life).

The Grandmother herself also represents the theme of wisdom amidst chaos. Though she had her own period of chaos, and remains nostalgic about it, she is subtly able to show that she learned her lesson, the hard way, about love, through the story of the man who gave her the wooden ring. Thus, during the first real scene after the introductory musical number, we see Frederica and the Grandmother sitting together, just as we do in the last scene. The two extremes of age within the play, the youngest and the oldest, and both the smartest. They represent the *bookends* of time itself: Frederica is smart due to the fact that she is still rather innocent and unaffected by feelings of romance, while the Grandmother is wise due to having lived through it all. The two of them together represent the passage of time, the passage of life, itself. Innocence, the madness of adulthood, and then the relative nostalgic peace of old age. In other words, a wonderful juxtaposition.

Personal Musings: I have seen *A Little Night Music* twice before: this was by far the best production of it I have ever seen. I've often found that in musicals, especially Sondheim for some reason, while the actors can sing, the acting itself can be lacking. This was certainly not the case here; I thought both the music and the acting itself were as perfect as they could be. The staging, and theater itself, definitely fits the aforementioned new form of Sondheim interpretation, which I feel is for the better. Being able to see every little facial expression, and to hear every sound, down to the sound of a creak in the door, is fantastic, and makes the show that much more intense, realistic, and engaging.

I personally loved the emphasis placed on theme of time, which I have never seen to prominently displayed within the production before. The subtlety with which it was represented was genius.

Thus far, I can say that this will probably prove to be the most definitive performance of this show that I will ever see, and that this was my favorite show seen on this trip (up to this point)!

The Cordelia Dream – Wilton’s Music Hall, 1/3/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director’s Vision: *The Cordelia Dream* is a case study in jealousy: how it affects the feeler, how it affects the target, and varying responses of both. This jealousy is made all the more complicated by the fact that it occurs between a father and his daughter, both of whom are musicians, thus creators. By showcasing the jealousy aspect, the play is able to show how this emotion then impacts the creative process, both for the better and for the worse. In short, the theme of the show is jealousy, and how it shapes the creative lives of two related musicians.

Setting: I do not know whether this show was written for the theater in which it was performed, but if it was not, then it was certainly a gargantuan stroke of luck that it was staged at Wilton’s Music Hall. We have yet to see a venue which more perfectly captured the entire vibe of the show itself. The complete lack of any heating lent credence to the isolation in which the father lived, with its pure lack of amenities. During the second act, the cold lent an almost ethereal quality to many of the events taking place, putting emphasis on the fact that the daughter may indeed be a ghost (though I do not believe this to be the case).

Audience and Intention: We are privy to the fact that due to his massive jealousy against his daughter, who found musical fame while he did not, the father has secluded himself away, and is slowly losing himself in his own world. His daughter feels tremendous guilt and anger at her father, and is willing to give up music in order to let him be happier. Hence, in the first act, we see that jealousy has stifled the creativity of the father, but as the target, the daughter is willing to surrender her own creativity in order to make him happy.

But in the second act, we see that the father has still not surrendered his jealousy, therefore his creativity is still stifled. Not only that, but he has lost his mind and is slowly dying. In the words of T.S. Eliot “Dissipation is much worse than cataclysm.” His daughter appears to him, almost as a ghost (though I believe her to be real). She has reconciled herself as the target of her father’s jealousy, and has forgiven him. Not only that, she pities him, for she knows that he has essentially dug his own grave. The message here is that jealousy, when not dealt with, will only increase, and that it absolutely destroys the creative. And if the target of jealousy can learn to forgive, and even pity the prosecutor, than she will be the better for it and retain control, unlike the father who loses his mind.

Personal Musings: First of all, I am very angry that I missed the opportunity to see the question and answer period with the actors post-show; I had no idea it was going to happen! And I had so many questions! Next time.

Had I put two and two together (meaning realized the significance of the name “Cordelia”) I would have certainly given myself a refresher course on *King Lear* before seeing the show, because I think the unnamed references and tie-ins with that show would have been

more obvious to me at the time of viewing, and probably could have given me even more to write about during this journal entry.

The complete dedication of David Hargreaves to his part was incredible: I have only once seen a play in which the actors are already acting when the doors open. Not only that, but he was able to remain scantily dressed, during intermission, when it was about 45 degrees. The man never left the stage for three hours, which is an unheard of amount of time to have to remain 100% in character. It was the acting equivalent to running a marathon, and I was very impressed. The opening of the second act in which he conducts an imaginary symphony was incredibly powerful, moving, and even a little disturbing; which, come to think of it, was like the whole show!

Oedipus – Olivier Theatre, 1/4/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The Director's vision in Oedipus was to put a very heavy stress on the *continuousness* of Oedipus' gradual yet constant descent from ruler to powerless insanity. This stress was represented through the set itself, the choices made by the actors, and even the simple fact that there was no intermission. Almost everything onstage pushed the theme of *change over time*. The idea was to illustrate to the viewer the complete destruction of Oedipus right before our eyes, so no space in-between: we *see* his complete downfall, which in a brutally ironic way, terminates with the destruction of Oedipus' own ability to see.

Setting: The set appears simple at first. However, the set of *Oedipus* contributed more than any other show seen thus far to the vision of the Director and the plot/themes of the show.

The utilization of the rotating stage in the Olivier Theater was fantastic! It was slow, almost unnoticeable at first, but the floor itself acted as a metaphor for Oedipus' slow breakdown as a human being. Once it began, it mirrored his descent, which was a constant, flowing process, which ceased to stop, just like the rotating stage. The slowly rotating stage can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the passage of time itself, because the stage could be seen as a clock turning around a fixed point, the point being the gargantuan door.

The door itself functioned as a way for there to be scene transitions without actual set alteration: one merely passes through the door to signify not only a new location, but also a new point in time. Its grandeur represents the initial grand status in which we find Oedipus; this is even more noticeable when the door completely disappears upon Oedipus' final and bloody entrance onto the stage. When the door is gone, so is every last vestige of control Oedipus' ever possessed.

The door, however grand, also seemed to be made of rusting cooper, as did the arched stage. I believe this to represent two things. First, it suggests the trouble state of Thebes: a grand city, yet in the midst of terrible strife (the rust). And second, I also see this as simply paying homage to ancient Greece itself, since everything on the stage (with the exception of the table) is reminiscent of Greek artifacts found from Sophocles' time period.

Audience and Intention: The audience for the show was certainly adults. The plot itself is full of hidden meanings which would escape the minds of most children. Additionally, the graphic use of blood during Oedipus' final entrance could prove slightly inappropriate for a younger audience.

At the start of the show, the audience itself is treated as Oedipus' subjects. We see him at the height of power, ready and willing to do whatever is necessarily to cure his sickened city. Not only is he ready and willing, but he is *able*. By addressing the audience directly, it is almost as if he has power over us as well. He is calm, collected, restrained yet passionate, physically put-together and tailored, comforting, and sympathetic. He can preach as well as listen. This

opening scene is the most important in the show, because it illustrates every one of Oedipus' finer virtues. Once those virtues have been laid out, the audience can truly view how Oedipus is destroyed via the systematic disappearance of all these qualities he possesses.

We first begin to witness his downfall as he starts losing his temper in his increasingly urgent need for resolution. His treatment of is terrible, due to both the nature of the news and the fact that we see a huge chink in Oedipus' mental armor: the entrance of fear. Fear in the form of prophesy. This inspires him to unwisely banish Creon.

Oedipus has also removed both his jacket and vest at this point in the show. This slow, gradual undressing of Oedipus is yet another subtle yet incredibly important indicator of his mental state. He keeps losing clothes, and what articles remain become unkempt and eventually bloodstained.

As we learn of his history, we also are privy not only to more fear but also Oedipus' ability to rage to the point of homicide. Yet again, Oedipus breaking down. Without summarizing the well-known plot, over the course of the show he further loses composure. He screams, cries, rages, attacks, until his final brutal act of self-mutilation. The genius of this production is that *we see all of this onstage*. Oedipus' character disintegration occurs in full view; the only time it does not is when he actually gouges out his eyes, but even then we see the total aftermath, unedited. We are a constant witness to his demise.

It should also be noted that there was a strong element of "returning to the womb" throughout the show. Oedipus is constantly putting his head against stomach, and he lays down with his head in her lap on multiple occasions; all this before the news that she is his mother. She comforts him like a child, not like he was a grown man and her husband. At the end of the show, we see Oedipus essentially in the state of a newly born (if not pre-born) baby: he is completely powerless, screaming, and fumbling, not really even able to move without additional help. When his children crowd around him, he seems on an equal level as them, not able to act as a comforting parent, but only as a fellow victim. He has not only made the fall from total power to powerless, but also the fall from *man to child*.

Simply put: since the acting and staging are so continuous, we are able to view all these little "straws to break the camel's back" as it were. The straws are many, and initially can be dealt with, but we are witness to the continual addition of yet more and more straws which also become larger themselves, until Oedipus himself is finally broken.

Personal Musings: I have seen many shows in my short lifetime, with innumerable actors. I have *never* seen a more commanding actor than Ralph Fiennes on stage before. He owned the stage, he was captivating to a degree I have never seen. I have never seen anyone with so much *presence* onstage, and I might never again. His performance was incredible, and I consider it an honor to have seen his last performance in the role.

I loved this production, and respect it: whenever a Director and cast are able to take a show in which everyone knows the ending and the plot (for thousands of years no less!) and

create something totally captivating and original, they deserve incredible amounts of praise.
This show was fantastic.

In a Dark Dark House – Almeida Theatre, 1/5/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The Director's vision for *In a Dark Dark House* was to highlight metaphorical *shadows*, to tie in with the repetition of "dark" in the title of the play. Lurking underneath any surface or situation, no matter how bright or seemingly innocent (in the form of Jennifer) or familial (the relationship between Terry and Drew), there is a literal and figurative darker side to everything. Exploring and exposing that darker side was the vision for this show. On the flip side of shiny coin is always a shadow, which in this case is an unsettling portrait of human existence.

Setting: The Almeida Theatre was small, which is the only kind of theatre I could imagine a show like this taking place in; one needs the intimacy of a small theatre in order to read the facial expressions and feel closer to what are indeed some quite intense emotions.

There is something to be said for the fact that this show takes place in America, with characters from the Tri-State area. The characters themselves tend to represent American stereotypes: the macho-tough guy who shies from emotions (Terry); the slick good-looking morally corrupt businessman (Drew), and the over sexualized teenage lolita (Jennifer). Also, one theme of the show, homosexuality, is shown to be completely taboo amongst these Americans, whereas in Europe and Great Britain it remains more accepted.

The stage itself remained unchanged throughout the three acts, and it acted as a rather neutral green backdrop upon which to stage the scenes. However, if one reads deeper, the larger trees in the back of the stage are much darker than the rest of the set, and while the middle of the stage is bright and green, the backdrop is dark and ominous.

The two-foot platform tearing of the stage also provided for some interesting pairings when it came to intimacy on stage. In particular, this came into play in Act II during the interactions between Terry and Jennifer: first, Terry is above Jennifer, who is on her knees in the lower level, the lower level representing an abstract innocence at this time. Following this, Terry joins her on the lower level. Finally, once the topic of sex has been thoroughly explored, both Terry and Jennifer move on to the upper level of the stage: the adult level.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show is certainly adults. The themes are ones which would only really be grasped by adults, as would the many little metaphors and juxtapositions.

Child abuse in the form of molestation is never an easy topic to address. However, by using the macho-"Joe Sixpack" character of Terry to expose it, we get to witness firsthand how a seemingly strong individual is actually hiding some terrible secrets. Not only that, but as Terry begins to address his secrets, his *shadows*, he begins to break down even further (not unlike Oedipus actually). He feels anger and fear, but he also feels guilt: guilt at the fact that he actually liked the acts themselves, which translates into guilt that he might be gay. The character of Terry was made so lonely as a child by his abusive father and non-responsive mother that the

only real “love” he felt came in the form of Todd the abuser. Hence, we see that Terry’s shadow, his abuse, was actually a light at the time. Yet, when we see the after-effects of the abuse, the light once again becomes a shadow. But does it really? Upon visiting Todd, Terry became upset that Todd did not recognize him after all the years had gone by, not due to the abuse itself. The whole relationship remains frustratingly confusing for the audience, as it should be, for it is how Terry feels as well.

Drew, initially, comes off as a sleeze-ball. A corrupt rich lawyer who never really grew up, in both mannerisms and actions alike. But then we begin to feel for Drew, after we found out that he was molested by Todd too. The audience sympathizes: we see the light emerging from the shadow that is Drew himself. But at the end of the show, when we find out Drew was lying the whole time about his molestation, all sympathy is erased, and we see that he is willing to betray the trust of literally everyone in his life, no matter what the cost; this time the cost being his brother’s psyche, as the show closes with a disheveled and broken Terry abandoned in Drew’s back garden while Drew resumes the festivities at his fancy party.

Jennifer is meant to represent a kind of innocence. However, this is not eternal innocence, but realistic innocence: innocence which is always, no matter what, lost. Sometimes it is crushed completely, such as in the case of Terry and his physical/sexual abuse. In Act II, we find Terry almost looking at a mirror image of himself as a young teen: witty, sociable, and isolated. We find the very real situation of a victim wanting to relive a traumatic situation, only this time as perpetrator. Is Terry seducing Jennifer for the pure sexual thrill? To deal with his own abuse by acting as abuser? Or is he trying to get revenge on Todd by engaging in sex with his underage daughter? We do not really know, except for the fact that Terry could not go through with the act. In Jennifer we see how quickly what is bright and innocent can be turned into a shadow.

Everyone in the show, even the unnamed characters, but on social masks that they wore for the world: Terry’s for sanity, Drew’s for manipulation, Jennifer’s as innocence etc. However, beneath every mask lay shadows, in the metaphorical Dark Dark places of everyone’s lives.

Personal Musings: Right off the bat, I need to say that I have never in my life experienced such intense tension during a scene as during Act II of *In a Dark Dark House*. From the second we see a young girl in a compromising situation being watched by Terry at the opening to the very end, the audience is on the very edge of its seat. The character of Jennifer was played brilliantly by Kira Sternbach throughout.

Believe it or not, I actually thought the New York accents got better over the course of the show; in the beginning I thought I heard through them, whereas at the end they sounded natural. Maybe that was just my getting into the show itself.

I found the character of Drew to be so sinister. No matter what the scene, he is always either smiling or crying: always exaggerated expressions. The same is true with his speech, in which he sounds more like a frat boy than a lawyer. However, the one singular time we hear

Drew speak normally and see his face as neutral is at the very end of the show, when Terry grabs him and calls him out for lying. In that instant, we see Drew drop his façade, because he has been exposed. Once that happens, he puts his mask on the best he can and leaves. But we really see how beneath everything Drew does is this base Darwinian instinct of “Kill or be killed.” Sinister indeed.

I enjoyed seeing this show as paired with the others thus far. While we have seen some darker material, it at many times was abstract or historical. The dark side of this show was based firmly in reality, which made it all the more different and powerful. Believe it or not, it's a welcome reprieve from the abstract!

Romeo and Juliet – Courtyard Theatre, 1/7/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The Director's vision for *Romeo and Juliet*, rather strangely, was not to put the emphasis on the tragic love story. Instead, the focus was placed on the *space between people, both in the physical and mental sense*. Questions were being posed: how can closeness breed hostility and violence, between strangers and intra-familial alike? When can that same closeness breed love and friendship? And most interestingly, how close is too close; when is metaphorical privacy necessary? In this version of *Romeo and Juliet*, it was not they who figuratively killed themselves, but everyone else around them who did, via violations of close bonds, both in violent and compassionate ways: through the acts of others, Romeo and Juliet are forced into their dire position. Both friends, enemies, and family became too close.

Setting: The setting placed the show essentially in The Godfather. The set was minimalistic, with only a few chairs and the movable bed, with the exception being the crypt scene). This stressed the *interpersonal* relationships, since it forced you to look at the actors rather than their setting. There was not even a balcony for the "balcony scene"! The use of switchblades truly hammered home the *close interpersonal relationship* element of the show. When swords, or even guns in this case, could easily be used as weapons at this time, instead it was small switchblade knives: in order to kill with that, one must be very close, and literally put in physical effort to drive it into the enemy. It was subtle way of implying very close violence.

Good use of the entire theater was made, since actors entered from all different points, and often made noise from behind the audience itself. This made for rather dynamic sound. And on the topic of sound, the choice of a marching jazz band was interesting. However, I personally felt that it detracted from the show: not because there was a band, but because the music they were playing seemed comical to me. Even their "tragic" music was more the tragic music of cartoons. Nonetheless, having them on stage did provide some imposing images when needed, especially due to the size of their instruments.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show could be both adults and children alike, though I doubt many children would be able to understand the language. However, the violence was not dealt with in an overtly graphic way, nor were the sexual themes, therefore it could be appropriate for a younger audience.

My thesis for this entry, that the focus is not put on Romeo and Juliet themselves but on the cast of characters which surround and manipulate them, arises from two possible places. Firstly, it could have been the Director's choice to do this, by downplaying the actual love chemistry between Romeo and Juliet. Secondly, it could have arisen from the fact that I found there to be no chemistry between the two due to simple bad acting (see my Personal Musings

below). Either way, I felt that this version portrayed the two lovers almost as puppets: they are forced into various situations, either purposefully or by accident, by those around them.

For starters, we have the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets; a feud which neither Romeo nor Juliet care about, yet it ends up affecting them profoundly. Whilst the both of them avoid the feud, they are fine. The both the marriage and the balcony scene occur during this period. However, with the addition of fellow kinsmen (albeit at Romeo's doing), things can take a turn for the worst. Tibalt kills Mercucio, thus driving Romeo to kill Tibalt. Hence, Romeo is dragged into the feud of which he wanted no part; due to the people around him, both family and friends, he is driven into exile. Juliet is put into a terrible situation, since her close cousin has been killed by Romeo, therefore her emotions are scattered to say the least. Once again, by finally inserting himself into the greater feud of the Montagues and the Capulets, more specifically Mercucio and Tibalt, Romeo begins the unraveling of his brief relationship.

The character of the Friar means good intentions for both, giving Juliet the faux poison in order to help her reunite with Romeo, but the plan famously backfires resulting in the tragic ending. By inserting himself within the relationship too far, the Friar, the man with the best intentions, ending up being the one most responsible for the relationship's destruction.

When left to their own devices, Romeo and Juliet worked as a relationship. However, it was those who surrounded them, both family and friend, which eventually brought their downfall, both directly and by proxy. Romeo and Juliet were unfortunate sacrificial pawns in a deadly game between two families, not merely two lovers driven to irrational acts by passion, as it is often portrayed. Again, whether this was the intention or not is up for debate, but it is the way I viewed this production.

Personal Musings: Once again, I am sad to report that I did not enjoy this production of a Shakespeare classic, just like *Hamlet*. In all truth, while I am not one to cast stones, I thought that the majority of the acting was quite bad. I found Juliet to be completely unbelievable, and Romeo not willing to enter into a rage. Worst of all though, I found Mercucio death scene to be a travesty. That scene, when I first saw it in the 4th grade, made me want to begin acting: that part and that scene. When done right, it is a genius arch which begins with pangs of humor and descends into the tortured curses of a dying man. Instead, for the final "A curse on both your houses", Mercucio said the lines straight-faced, deadpan, as he was dragged off stage in an almost comic manner, left to expire away from the audience. I was very disappointed.

However, I did feel that there were some shining performances however, these in the form of Friar John (James G. Bellorini) and Lord Capulet (Christopher Hunter). In the end though, I must say that my dreams of seeing an amazing Shakespeare play in the man's hometown were slightly dashed.

Don John – The Courtyard Theatre, 1/7/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision for *Don John*, an adaptation of the opera *Don Giovanni*, was to create a chaotic, whimsical, sinister, colorful, loud, intense, million-facet world, yet manage to find and highlight the one real aspect of that world which matters: love. Despite everything taking place around oneself, in the form of world news (the British strike), faith (in the form of the Preacher), pop culture (in the form of the sets and costumes), altered reality (alcohol and drugs), or in the form of lust (the character of Don John, amongst others), what ultimately matters in the end is realistic, incredibly difficult but worthwhile, *love*.

Setting: In stark contrast to *Romeo and Juliet*, which utilized minimalism only hours before, *Don John*'s stage was immense and intricate: multi-tiered scaffolding; industrial shipping crates at all levels which are portable, an actual band on stage right, multiple TVs flashing images, radio's constantly changing stations, falling balloons, and even a disco ball. The costumes are vintage 1970s kitsch, with bellbottoms, flower prints, incredibly bright and contrasting colors, tacky suits, cowboy boots, animal prints, and the wonderful combination of a navy blue oversized wooly sweater over leather pants (Don John's personal attire). The music, both recorded and live, is intense, bombastic, and has a Phil Spector "wall of sound" vibe to it. [Of personal note to me: I have been a guitar player my entire life, and since we were sitting right in front of the band, I had a good look at the guitarists' gear. Everything he used, from the guitar to the amplifier to the pedals, was vintage 1970s gear!].

The reason for the 1970s culture blitz is to create the aforementioned intense chaotic reality, in which it is easy for oneself to become lost or led astray by the natural environment, the people in it, and the opportunities it presents.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show is adults. The themes are ones which would only really be grasped by adults, and almost all of the shows situations, be they sexual, violent, or drug induced, are meant for a mature audience.

In this chaotic world which has been created by all aspects of the setting, we are privy to a host of failed "loves". Don John himself is the obvious main example of this: even in midst of his titanic number of sexual conquests, he is still alone and devoid of real love. He uses his hanger-on Nobby as a companion/lover, but there is no real love there, just dependency. Seeking solace in sex, pills, and alcohol, Don John eventually dies trying to fill the hole in his life left by an absence of love.

But we also see other failed instances of love. Alan the preacher and Anna have a failed relationship, because he is too reserved/busy to show his love to Anna. Even when he vows to seek revenge for the killing of Anna's father and the pseudo-rape, it is too little too late, as Anna realizes that she just cannot love Alan anymore. We are witness to Elvira, who confuses her all-

consuming infatuation with Don John after a single one-night-stand for love, essentially stalking him, but to no avail. Nobby is a perpetual leech, first looking for validation as second-fiddle to Don Jon, and then indulging in the “scraps” that Don John discards, in this case that being Elvira.

The only true instance of love that we find is between Derek and Zerlina. It would seem unlikely: Zerlina is an attractive extrovert, and Derek is a rather homely awkward man. Zerlina can barely speak English, and Derek speaks no Polish. Zerlina actually cheats on Derek with Don John, the man who also seriously beats up Derek after the fact. However, theirs is the relationship which is being illustrated as true love by this production: even though they have both made mistakes and faced challenges, and despite the crazed world which surrounds them, they are resolved to keep trying. It will never be perfect, because nothing ever is, but as long as they try together, it will work out. That is exactly the type of love this show is exhaulting.

Personal Musings: *Don John* is the best show I have ever seen. Plain and simple. I have never experience time flying by that fast during a theater production before; I didn't want the show to end! Hands down, I have never enjoyed seeing a show more than *Don John*.

I am not quite so sure why I loved it so much. The acting all-around was phenomenal. I have also never seen a stage utilized like that before; the whole show was so incredibly dynamic. The flow of the show, with its emotional peaks and crescendos falling at usually times really grabs the viewer and pulls them in, yet the audience is eased into both acts by the mundane scene of the laid-off workers around a trashcan-fire, and the newsboy narrative introducing and building the coming scene. The show was graphic, which is always enjoyable, but it was also funny too; it encapsulated so much.

I also must admit, seeing Dan up on stage dancing with one of the actress' was great too!

But I think what really got me was the message of the show: how love, whatever kind it is, is what matters. And love is not perfect, nor ideal. It's hard, it hurts, but ultimately, it can be worth it. I think this can all be summed up by the line Derek says to his new wife: “You don't have you tell me all your secrets, as long as you tell me your truths.”

August: Osage County – Lyttelton Theatre, 1/8/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision for this was to present an emotionally-loaded tragic comedy exposing the many varying inter-familial relationships found within the Weston family, and in the greater scheme of things, all families. The idea was to provide a literal window into the lives of these characters, often different ones at the same time. However, the term used to describe *August: Osage County* should not be tragic comedy, but comedic tragedy: while the play is hilarious at times, the ending is so eerie and dark that one must apply the emphasis on tragedy. While the theme of family unrest is universal, the exact situations themselves never are. Tolstoy said in the opening lines of *Anna Karenina* that "Happy families are all alike: every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." This is certainly true in Osage County.

Setting: The setting tied in perfectly with the vision of the show. We are provided with a complete three-story cross section of a house, in which we can see into almost every single room completely, with the exception of the kitchen, which is only partial. Because of this, we are able to see multiple scenes at once: people talking downstairs while Violet is staring out the window recovering from an outburst and Bill is smoking outside; the entire family sitting for dinner while Johanna is busy cooking etc. We see almost everything in the show except the suicide of Beverly, which occurs outside of the house anyways.

Setting this show in Oklahoma provides yet more interesting aspects to the family issue: there tends to be a stronger emphasis on familial ties in the southern United States. There is also a tendency to either stay put in one's hometown for good or to leave for good. This tension comes into play between many of the characters, particularly between the three Weston sisters, two of whom have left and feel removed from the home, and one of whom remained at the home and is thus resentful. Violet also appears to have an inferiority complex for those who left Osage county, constantly berating herself and her house for "not being good enough" to the outsiders, albeit this is done maliciously and sarcastically.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show is adults. The themes are ones which would only really be grasped by adults, and almost all of the show's situations, be they sexual, violent, or drug induced, are meant for a mature audience.

We are shown many different strained family relationships, the most prominent of which is that of Violet with her daughters and ultimately, once we hear how she essentially let Beverly die, her husband. We see the strained relationships between the sisters themselves, one of which is living the life of a soon-to-be divorcee with a daughter, one who is trying to fulfill her dreams of money by marrying rich, and one of whom remained home. The Fordham's, eldest sister being the mother, are getting a divorce, and their teenage daughter is filled with teenage angst. Troy, the rich man Karen intends to marry, makes improper passes at Molly the teenager, to

which Karen is willing to turn a blind eye to live her dream, now tarnished. The Aiken family is run by the constant complaints and grievances of Mattie Fay. Her son, Little Charles, obvious has a social disability and is carrying on a secret affair with Ivy, who happens to be his half-sister (though they don't know it).

All of this in fact sounds like a soap opera, and it should. All of these characters have strained connections with each other; some of the connections are positive, but most are negative. When you take these many strained connections and put them all together, then you have the literal madhouse which is the house in Osage County. In fact, it was the collective scenes which were the strongest: with all of the interpersonal conflicts now established, it was as though one was watching a time bomb, waiting for it to go off due to any number of catalysts. Act II, during which the family has the mourning dinner, which ends in a powerful crescendo and a seizing of power, is a great example of this.

Throughout the show we have Johanna, the housekeeper, looking on. The fact that she is a Native American amongst rural white people already gives her a mystique, both to the characters and the audience. She does not do much throughout the show, but it's what other characters do to her that is important. The character of Johanna represents a *respite*, in every way. However, she does not represent a cure; quite the opposite in fact: she is often sought as relief for an already-destroyed situation. For instance, at the opening of the show, Beverly is essentially able to get one last real conversation in, with Johanna while hiring her, before he leaves to quite possibly commit suicide. Molly retreats to Johanna's room to smoke pot, but smoking due to the fact that her parents are getting a divorce. Joanna saves Molly from the advances of Troy via a frying pan, but the discover of this act in itself destroys the dreams of Karen, embarrasses the entire family, and marks the breaking-up point of the family as people leave the house.

And finally, Johanna is sought at the end of the show by Violet, after we find out that Violet let Beverly die rather than save him in order to obtain money. The house is darkened and, for once, empty. Violet reverts back to a childlike state, eventually screaming and stumbling her way into Johanna's lap. Johanna offers no advice, instead reciting the words of T.S. Eliot, the man whose words kicked off the show.

In these situations, to which Joanna is a temporary respite, there is no happy ending. The entire show is a demonstration that even family love, the familial bonds which are meant to last from birth until death, can be completely and permanently broken. No hope, no future, no happy ending.

Personal Musings: This was an incredibly impressive show; I feel very lucky to have seen it with the original Tony Award-winning cast.

Too often, I feel that shows are given the label of "tragic comedy", when they are either pure tragedies or just darker comedies. However, I have never seen a show which can be better labeled as such. Many parts of *August...* were absolutely hilarious. Of course, many of them were incredibly serious. The ending is probably the darkest thing I have ever seen on stage. The

comedy needed to be inserted into the show, otherwise all of the tragedy would not have been possible: 1) it would wear the audience down, 2) it's realistic, and 3) the tragedy seems all the more tragic when placed next to humor. The beats that each actor and the collective cast hit were all perfectly timed and executed; it was very obvious how comfortable the cast were with each other and how long they had been performing this show.

All in all, when I knew we were to see a show running at three and a half hours, I glumly sat in my seat. However, not only was I pleasantly surprised, I was emotionally moved by what proved to be one of the most impressive shows I have seen.

Twelfth Night – Wyndham’s Theatre, 1/8/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director’s Vision: The artistic vision for this show (the ideas of no less than Kenneth Branagh) was to create a light, almost “*breezy*” setting, which in turn would be copied in the actions of the characters themselves, who change loves and appearances almost on a whim, like the wind. While other productions might place a stronger emphasis on the struggles and tribulations of love and eventual reunion of a brother and sister, this production treats that reunion, and the various loves involved, all equally, showing them to be significant, yet fleeting and impermanent. In essence, the vision of this production of *Twelfth Night* was to highlight the impermanence of emotions, chiefly love, and of very identity itself.

Setting: The setting of the show was perfect for the theme: a wide, largely open stage which can be manipulated and filled as one sees fit, then changes again. The physical setting, with its upscale 1930s beachfront motif, yet again stressed the idea of impermanence. We are constantly hearing birds and sound of the ocean: waves, which constantly ebb and flow, and the wind, which always blows and never ceases at the water’s edge. These are all subtle nuances which lend credence to the artistic vision.

Audience and Intention: Once again, the stress of this show was placed on impermanence. But with so many different romantic and familial situations, should not the emphasis of the show be placed on those? The answer is not necessarily: like many of Shakespeare’s comedies, all conflict is resolved at the end of the show at a pace which is absolutely ridiculous, and effective to the point of absurdity. The highlight of these comedies is not then in the ending, and the final relationships, but in the *journey* towards that end. In *Twelfth Night*, that journey is entirely comprised of impermanence.

For starters, we have Viola, who transforms her gender right at the start of the show in order to get by after the shipwreck. Her new employer, Orsino, confesses undying love for Olivia, yet slowly begins falling in love with Viola, who is still disguised as a man (this production particularly played this aspect up). This makes Orsino impermanent in his sexual preference. Olivia falls in love with Viola, dressed as a man. At the end of the show, Orsino ends up with the now-female Viola: he went from loving one woman, to having feelings for another man, to falling in love what used to be a man but what is now in fact female. Impermanence if it ever truly existed.

One can also look at the character of Malvolio. At the shows start, he is a high-minded emotionless steward to Olivia. His one real goal in life is that of maintaining/increasing his social status. Upon having the fake note planted by Maria and Sir Toby, he transforms himself into a man possessed by immediate love, willing to change both appearance and attitude in order to attain his new goal, which is love. Ironically, eventually puts him at the very bottom of the

social pecking order when he is imprisoned for perceived insanity: the exact opposite of his restrained, socially-conscious character. In the end, he reverts back to his original demeanor.

These are just a few of the examples of impermanence highlighted by the show. Most strikingly, it is Feste the jester, who is constantly cracking jokes and staging gags for everyone, who gives us the most serious moment in the show, during which he sings about fleeting love. Hence, both his song and state of being are impermanent as well.

Personal Musings: Out the three Shakespeare shows we've seen, I can finally say that I thoroughly enjoyed one! I loved the way the show was treated in such an "airy" manner: even the combat or arrest scenes were painting in a whimsical non-serious way. The text was done justice, the acting superb, and the modern adaptation applied flawlessly. There were no extraneous frills on the production; that stage, for the most part, remained barren with the exception of the actors themselves. To see Derek Jacobi, who always plays such stoic characters in movies, use that same stoicism to hilarious effect was marvelous; the scene where he attempted to smile was priceless. Zobin Varla was particularly effective and impressive as Feste.

I saw a community production of *Twelfth Night* last summer, and was disappointed at how the show quickly became a slap-stick affair, with Sir Toby, Sir Aguecheek, and Feste acting literally as circus clowns, setting the tone for the rest of the show as well. But the production we just saw was able to remain funny without descending into buffoonery, a fact which I greatly appreciated.

It is nice to just have a laugh and enjoy oneself, and not have to try and decipher some kind of higher metaphor being present. Sometimes, a laugh is just a laugh. A laugh is fleeting and impermanent. Hmmm, wasn't that actually the underlying message of the show....

Family Reunion – Donmar Warehouse, 1/9/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The purpose of this show, though done in an abstract and complicated way, is actually quite simple. It means to ask a single question: what *is* reality? And by proxy, if reality itself is being questioned, then what is family? How can human beings define their relationships to one another in the face of such a question? The answer is that only those who chose to ask the very question itself are able to truly relate to each other. Complacency breeds ignorance, but questioning can bring enlightenment. Often painful enlightenment, but enlightenment nonetheless. And the true importance of asking "What is reality?" *is not finding an answer, but being able to ask the question in itself.*

Setting: The setting of the show provides the classic backdrop for a rural thriller: an old musty house, with plenty of dark open spaces. We are privy to only the dinner room, which though decorated in fine Victorian props still appears downright spooky. The costumes and time period, though they could be manipulated, remain in what appears to be the mid-1930s, where Eliot originally intended. The whole setting essentially lays out the stage for a ghost story: Harry's murdered wife appears twice (though from my seat I unfortunately missed the first appearance), and the little boys meant to represent Harry's innocence also make multiple appearances.

The house, with its upper-crust Victorian and Edwardian trappings, is also able to provide a stark literal contrast to the very question being posed. They are decadent, largely useless pieces of furniture and art, which can hardly be said to have been constructed with the idea of transcendence in mind. They are a very visible part of the world being brought into question *by* the question.

One thing deserving of mention is that the theater itself was not perfectly suited to the show. Many parts of the stage, particularly the parts used for the ghosts, were indivisible to different sections of people at different times.

Audience and Intention: For starters, I will admit a sufficient lack of knowledge in the realm of Western mythology to completely unravel and comprehend many of the subtle metaphors being presented. Additionally, the show is abstract and dense. However, I have laid out my individual thesis above, and will continue to explore it here. I might even possibly be able to bring something new to the table from my lack of being able to see what is already laid out for dinner, so to speak.

The characters of Harry, Mary, and Agatha are the only ones who have asked themselves "the question." Harry was forced to upon "murdering" his wife; Agatha did when she actually gave birth to Harry but surrendered him over to Amy; Mary did when her father died while she was young. All three of these characters are in tune with a great reality, or lack thereof, and are thereby able to see situations, and life in general, in a unique way. They question, and go against

the grain, and are not afraid of the ramifications of doing so. They were forced to question their own realities due to traumatic events in their lives. However, as such, they are now able to better see the world around them, and even though they might not always understand the meaning of what they see, they are aware of a greater presence due to their heightened conscious. Therefore, these three share a bond throughout the course of the show.

Now juxtapose the three enlightened against the four main aristocrats in the show: Violet, Denman, Colonel, and Ivy. These four often acted as a type of Greek chorus, speaking directly to the audience in a synchronized monotone which was incredibly powerful. These are the unenlightened: the ones afraid to ask questions (such as “How is Harry doing?”), who avoid confrontation, and are content to learn what little they do about the world from a newspaper while residing comfortable in their plush armchairs. They worry about what will be for dinner, and what would be the proper thing to wear, as opposed to questions which extend beyond their own material worlds. Ivy, in particular, does this to comical extent, providing some of the few laughs to be found within the show.

Trapped in the middle we have the character of Amy. She straddles both worlds: the enlightened and the unenlightened. She is well aware of the question, as it were. However, she tried to live in the world of the unenlightened: for it is in this world which she believes Harry will come back and restore her fading house to its former glory. But upon seeing that Harry will not do this, and that he has fully taken the stance of Agatha, Amy’s counterpart, Amy realizes that neither world is able to satisfy her, and the audience is left with the fact that she is probably dying at the end of the show.

Therefore, this is really a show about *being willing to question reality*.

Personal Musings: Upon first seeing this show, I did not enjoy it. I found it convoluted, and every single time I thought I might be grasping what was happening, Agatha would open her mouth and I would begin drowning in metaphors yet again. I am also painfully aware that T.S. Eliot often draws from Greek and Roman mythology, of which I know very little. Asian mythology, and I would be the world’s leading-most Eliot scholar, but this was not to be.

However, after much thought and the physical writing of this journal, I have come to much better appreciate the show, and to actually tie it in with what I know best: Asian cultures (Anthropology and Japanese double-major, Asian Studies certificate). The question of discovering enlightenment is at the very core of Buddhism. And while the ultimate goal is the attainment of enlightenment, it is the actual search itself which is to be most commendable. The ability to reflect and question is paramount.

To quote classical Chinese Zen master Mingjiao:
“Nothing is more honorable than enlightenment, nothing more beautiful than virtue. Those who have enlightened virtue have it though they be ordinary people, while those who lack enlightened virtue lack it even though they be kings.” – Tanqin Annals

I think this quote actually fits in very well with *Family Reunion*: we see the “kings” in the form of the unenlightened, almost innocent aristocrats, and we see the “ordinary people” in the

form of a murderer, a lonely young woman, and an older woman wrestling with her past demons. They are held up in the show as the “heroes”, or I suppose “anti-heroes” would work better here, just as they would be in Zen Buddhism, since they are willing to question and are better for it.

Hence, after finally getting my own reading on the play itself, I found it very enjoyable to then try and relate that to a seemingly unrelated field within which I have experience! It allowed me to much greater appreciate the production.

And on a final note, I recognized both Paul Shelley (Colonel) and Una Stubbs (Ivy) from the very same episode of John Cleese’s 1970s TV show *Faulty Towers!* Being a huge fan of the show, it made the experience of seeing these actors in person very neat!

La Cage Aux Folles – Playhouse Theatre, 1/10/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision for *La Cage Aux Folle* was to create a total and outrageous spectacle, while at the same time delivering an underlying message of acceptance and being confident in one's self.

Setting: The Playhouse Theatre was the perfect venue for this production. It was not only large, but also had some wonderful artistic flourishes adorning almost every pillar, booth, and the framing of the stage itself.

There were numerous sets, many of them quite lavish and detailed, which was actually in contrast to many of the shows we have seen so far, where much of the setting was left to the imagination; these sets were literal. And they were dynamic sets as well, many of them full of lighting and also with multiple levels from which to work. This was certainly epitomized by the grand staircase used in the final scene of the show from which everyone descends dancing. Additionally, due to the fact that the sets were so omnipresent and full, it was made that much more powerful at the end of Act I when Albin has his/her beautiful personal affirmation of who he is by the fact that there was no real focus on set at all: just one lone spotlight on Albin for the majority. But on a whole, the sets were definitely part of creating a huge spectacle.

The costumes were also meant to contribute to the spectacle idea as well, particularly those of Les Cagelles: they were both outrageous and provocative.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show, while some of the themes might go over the heads of some children, could definitely be for both adults and kids. Essentially, under all of the glitz, glam, and entertainment level, it's a story about family and self acceptance, which is understandable to almost any age group.

There were so many artistic devices used to create a decadent spectacle. First of all, much of the show features men in outrageous forms of drag. Even though the origins of the show are not British, there is a rich history in modern British comedy of men in drag: one needs think no further than older TV shows like *Monty Python* and newer ones like *Little Britain* (the later of which is written and starring David Williams, whom we saw in *No Man's Land*).

There were numerous raucous song and dance routines, often featuring quite incredible displays of gymnastics as well as Vegas-style synchronized movements. Obviously, much of this was hyper-sexualized as well. A great device used within the show is that while the audience is obviously witness to the show *La Cage Aux Folles*, we are also involved in the show itself, as we are treated as though we are guests who have attended the club in order to see the performance within the club. In other words, the audience is treated as though it is seeing a show within a show, and that they are actually part of that show in the form of a club audience. This

was highly effective in drawing the viewer in via literal involvement, thus able to great witness the spectacle unfolding before them.

Additionally, the show was incredibly funny, both in dialogue and situation. However, this also would not be possible without some kind of tension, and therein lies the underlying message of the show: acceptance.

This message of acceptance can be found in two forms: both self-assurance and acceptance of others, particularly one's own family. The self-assurance aspect comes in the form of Albin's powerful song at the end of Act I, which comes after he is ridiculed for who he is: a homosexual drag queen. But he comes to the conclusion that one must be one's self and comfortable in one's own skin, regardless of how the outside world may treat you.

The acceptance of others, especially family, can be seen in Albin and Georges' adopted son finally accepting and standing up for Albin, even in the face of his possible father-in-law, thus jeopardizing his own marriage plans in order to stand up for his family, when at first he tried to hide the facts. It all works out in the end, with even the future father-in-law reluctantly accepting the circumstances and the lifestyle of his new family.

In other word, the spectacle, while grand and entertaining, is merely just a way of delivering the message that acceptance of the self and others is a paramount virtue among human beings.

Personal Musings: This was a fantastic show! I admit full ignorance of the show's actual theme and content before going in, except for the fact that I knew it was famous. It was nice to see another musical, particularly one with so much entertainment and shock value with all of the outrageous sets, costumes, dancing, acrobatics, and downright twisted sex appeal on all levels (I developed a gargantuan crush on Anne all in the space of two minutes).

The message itself was also very touching: self-acceptance is an issue which all people, myself certainly included, deal with during at least one point in their life. The same is also true of one's family, particularly the possible embarrassment of its various quirks when trying to introduce and induct new members into that family. But in the end, it all comes down to being confident in those people who matter, support, and love one throughout their life, the self included.

And might I just add, WE FINALLY GET TO SEE A BRITISH STANDING OVATION! How wonderfully ironic that it occurred on our final official play! I did not think it was possible, and even if Jesus himself had appeared on stage and turned water into wine he would only have received the traditional bout of clapping, since the British audiences did not seem to hoot and holler either. I figured that our own little group would always been the lone ones ever standing, but the British finally proved me wrong! Kudos to them!

Complicit – Old Vic Theatre, 1/10/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision for *Complicit* was to present a very modern, controversial, and divisive topic within American and world society, but examined from the perspective of a single individual. While we often look at the large issues of September 11th and the subsequent use of torture from a removed perspective, this show attempted to put a human face and emotions on an individual involved in the process, in the form of writer Ben Kritzner. The show covers his fear, his anguish, his feelings of responsibility to country, family, and personal ideals alike, and most of all, his guilt. Thus, the show is about putting human emotions onto larger events a process which in itself makes a profound anti-torture argument by trying to put a human face on the victims, regardless of whether they be guilty or not.

The show makes no qualms about its stance on the issue of torture, as the show's program itself contains a trove of information regarding the Geneva Convention.

Setting: This was by far one of the most dynamic sets which we have seen thus far, and from our vantage point in the balcony I actually feel we had the best view of what was going on. The set was inundated with TVs, both large and small, under the clear plexiglass stage as well as above it. These TVs, in addition to being a commentary in themselves on the massive amount of media coverage on the events being discussed, were also able to provide rather startling and unnerving scene changes, and to show the aforementioned pre-recorded TV interviews with Kritzner. The interviews themselves were of particular note, since many times certain phrases and words, many of them disturbing, were repeated, as though there were a glitch in the programming. It was a clear device at trying to insert a clear message about the brutality of the torture itself; the fact that such brutality can be discussed almost casually within an interview is part of the statement that we have become too removed from the issues at hand, making it impossible to insert the human element, which is the whole point of this show.

Audience and Intention: The whole show revolves around the specter of the 9/11 attacks and the use of torture afterwards. However, it deals with the tribulations of a single man, Kritzner, and his personal actions to the events at hand. The point is to humanize what are unfortunately events which often lack a human face, therefore making them hard for most to relate to on a personal level.

At the end of the show, we learn of Kritzner's *fear* in the wake of 9/11, which led him to pen what became a famous article, which seems to support the use of torture; this is an event he greatly regrets as time passes. We also see his fear in the form of being tried by the United States government itself for the crime of leaking sensitive government information given to him by a source.

However, the reason for his subsequent publishing of said information was the fact that Kritzer felt extreme *guilt* over the fallout from his article, which he felt proved instrumental in the implementing of torture by the United States government. Whether or not his article did actually have any influence within the government policy is not known; regardless, he feels the guilt that it did. During his final monologue, he describes being a “child of the sixties”, who always was willing to question authority and directly challenge it if necessary, yet now he feels that due to his fear he was *complicit* with whatever the government wanted.

So in addition to the fear and guilt Kritzer feels, we also see his commitment to *responsibility*. He has a strongly-held journalistic code which he follows, which involves never revealing a source, thereby compromising your integrity. However, at the same time, both Kritzer and the audience are constantly reminded of Kritzer’s responsibility to his family by his wife Judith. In the end, Kritzer makes the choice to compromise his journalistic responsibility in order to save him and his family. In essence, something akin to *Sophie’s Choice*.

Thus, we see a human face put on larger events: we see fear, guilt, and responsibility, all of which are emotions often felt by Americans, though sometimes in vastly different ways, when dealing with the issues of 9/11 and torture.

Which brings us to the final scene, in which we see Kritzer being water-boarded. I know I stand in contrast to some of my peers on this point, but I believe this scene to be purely metaphorical and not literal. Kritzer has been the human face put onto all of these events throughout the whole show: in the end, his face is also being put onto the victims themselves. He is trying to mutter the phrase from his article with seemed to support torture, while being tortured at the same time. This is a loud and clear message to advocates of torture within the media: this is what real torture is, these are human victims, not just some abstract label of “terrorist”. More importantly, it sends the message that as long as things such as torture are condoned, none of us are safe from it.

Personal Musings: First of all, the movie buff within me needs to state what a privilege it was to see Richard Dreyfuss, Elizabeth McGovern, and David Sutton, all of whom I am familiar with through film, perform live. Not only that, but we had the honor of an opening speech by none other than Director Kevin Spacey! Plus, all of this in the legendary (also refurbished) Old Vic Theatre. It was certainly fun to have the most star-studded show be my final one of the trip.

I also personally believe in the message of the play whole-heartedly: that torture, regardless of situational circumstances, is wrong and never truly justified. It was very nice to see that humanizing message presented by an American writer, director, and actors in a foreign country; its small way of changing America’s image of a bunch of international bullies and hypocrites by showing that there are indeed many American who do not fit the international stereotype.

Additionally, it was very refreshing to see a show on the cutting edge, meaning one utilizing new ideas and modern themes, with the script written only last year and this being its world debut. It was the only show I saw which dealt directly with modern political events that

are of particular and engrossing importance for many Americans, often dividing great numbers of people into opposing camps. In fact, the show was so new that we actually still technically saw it during its final rehearsal phase: the fourth and final showcase. This was the only show in which we were able to witness part of the creation phase, mistakes and ad-lips in all. We essentially got to see the masters at work, using their craft to create an end product, and we were witness to this process. It was very interesting.

I was greatly impressed with the dynamic set and the way media was utilized: for a show about an issue which has been covered by actual media to such an extent, it made sense to incorporate said media into the show itself in the form of pre-filmed dialogues.

All in all, I am incredibly glad that I chose to see this optional show. Yes, it did interfere with my packing for home, but it was so worth it. Essentially, the perfect end to what shaped up to be a perfect trip.

Final Thoughts

During this trip, we saw a multitude of varying productions. We saw musicals, farces, tragedies, a pantomime, and various combinations thereof. Some of these were literal and linear, while others were abstract and surreal. Some were brand new shows, while others were hundreds of years old; some were hundreds of years old yet adapted to modern settings. These productions were put on by actors, puppets, and visual media, in stages which varied from basements to grand halls, aging Victorian buildings with no heat to newly renovated legendary venues. In other words, our little groups was witness to just about every type of theatre, type of venue, and type of plot that London had to offer at that time. Within so much variety, it can be tempting to look at the differences between the shows; mind you, there are many more differences than there are similarities. However, there are similarities between many of the shows, many of which are obvious.

However, I do believe I found a theme which can be found throughout each production: the concept of family. Even if the central theme of the show was not family, it always came up at one time or another. We see many different key issues regarding family, and within different shows we often see the same issue dealt with in different ways, be it comically, tragically, abstractly, or anything else. We witnessed numerous subjects within the topic of family: the triumph of family (*Cinderella*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *A Little Night Music*, *Twelfth Night*), the destruction of family (*Hamlet*, *Loot*, *The Cordelia Dream*, *Oedipus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *August: Osage County*), the absence of family (*No Man's Land*, *Don John*, *In a Dark Dark House*), the redefinition of family (*Family Reunion*, *War Horse*, *Gethsemane*), the responsibility one has to family (*Complicit*); these are only a few of the many aspects of family covered. Additionally, almost all of the shows above can fit into numerous of the above categories: *Don John* also involves the triumph of family in the form of Derek and Zelinka's relationship, and the same can be said for *Hamlet* since he ultimately avenges his father's death. *In a Dark Dark House* could also be viewed as the destruction of family due to Terry's strained relationship with his father and Drew's immoral manipulations of Terry; *Family Reunion* could just as easily be seen as the destruction of family, since even though Harry has acquired a metaphorical family, he loses his biological one.

This multi-faceted nature of the shows can be listed ad infinitum. However, the one all-encompassing thread is the *significance of family*. One might be tempted to consider "significance" as indicative of a "positive" thing, but this is not the case. It *can* be a positive thing, but it can also be an extremely *negative* thing. Sometimes it can be both. The shows clearly demonstrate this fact. But what is undeniable is the *importance* which the idea of "family", by blood, by common bond, by its mere absence, has in every single one of the shows

seen on this trip. Even when not the central theme, the concept is still there and given a unique treatment by each show.

Why is this the case? Why would “family” be a theme found in all the shows? The answer is that it can be found in all lives. Once again, even those without family are dealing with the absence of family. It is a concept with which every human being deals with, almost on a daily basis. If creation is reflective of the artist, no matter how abstract the piece, be it a play, song, or picture, then some element of that artist will show through in the piece. Every human being deals with the concept of family during at least one point in their lives: it is only natural that the idea family be present in everything we’ve seen. Family is omnipresent.

On a Personal Note

This trip proved to be one of the greatest things I have ever done in my life. That statement is not an exaggeration in any sense of the word; if anything, it is an understatement. Without going into too much detail, the trip came about at a time when I really needed it. Not only was it incredibly fun (something which I had not experienced in a while due to a variety of circumstances), but I was able to prove my own independence in the wake of the health issues which currently have me sidelined during this Spring Semester.

I came into this trip not knowing a single other participant, and I left with so many new friends; friends who I remain in daily contact with and see whenever I am in Rochester. I believe I have made some connections which will last for a very long time.

This also served as one hell of a grand re-entry into the world of Theater. Theater dominated my high school years, and I spent almost all of my energy acting in a variety of shows and parts, but when I came to the University of Rochester, I made a vow to myself to focus exclusively on Academics. After doing that for most of my college career, and earning a very nice GPA for myself, I felt a yearning to return to my artistic base, because it is what I value most in life. I was hesitant and scared: would I still like the theater? Would this make me regret giving it up for so long? Would I be envious of those currently engaged in it? The answers to all of these questions were mute from the second I stepped into that first show and began doing a call and response with a puppet no less! It feels wonderful to be back, and I plan on being involved in some kind of theater, hopefully at Todd, during my final semester at Rochester.

This experience changed my life in so many more ways than I should or could express in this academic journal, but rest assured that this whole experience came around at the perfect time for me. It is an experience I will never forget, and I cannot thank you enough for letting me participate.