

## Red Riding Hood - 12/28

One aspect of this performance that really struck me was the subtle but omni-present embrace of the sexual undertones which underlie so many of the archetypal fairy tales. In this version of the play, feminine virtue is attacked on two points - the woodsman and the wolf. This surprised me a bit, because in the versions of the story I know, Red Riding Hood's mother is barely a character, and has no sexual interest in the woodsman.

By adding innuendo about the woodsman's large axe at the beginning, the author of the play reveals the dominant masculine threat towards the entirely-female society of Red's family. The entire woods fiasco is precipitated by the fact that the girls' usually-chaste mother accepts a date with this outside threat, making it so that she could not bring food to her own mother - nourishing the matriarchy.

Then, Little Red begins to be threatened by the other destructive masculine force of the play - the Big Bad Wolf. To make himself less intimidating, he disguises himself as a little old woman, joining the matriarchy himself. Not only does he wish to violate Little Red, however, he also wants to stop her from reaching her grandmother and supporting the matriarchal line. Interestingly, the author also has the wolf offer Little Red a poisoned apple - an allusion to a story in which an intruding woman seeks to destroy the natural female heir of the existing line.

When the wolf finally reaches his prey, his act of consumption is highly sexualized. He and the grandmother exchange blows, after which he forces her onto the bed. The stage is then dimmed as we see his form hunched over her, and the adult audience cannot tell if she is being eaten or raped. Adding to this in some bizarre way I have not entirely worked out, is the grandmother's casting as a transvestite. She is both male and the most sexually over female (other than the wolf's mate), complicating the picture. While on stage, Little Red's consumption

is less overtly sexual, the conversation in the stomach did mention her getting thrown onto the bed.

Finally, the huntsman reveals himself to be less of a threat to the women of the story when he reveals his weapon of choice to be much smaller, and his profession much more benign. While he does cut the wolf open, this play is carefully constructed so that what is usually an act of violence is instead one of compassion for the life in all things. He does not kill the wolf in what would be an act of solitary dominance. Instead, a group of mixed genders works together to lull the wolf to sleep before the woodsman operates. This corrupts the ideals of masculinity even further, allowing the group to succeed instead of a single alpha male. Finally, the woodsman tames the wolf. The unruly male threat is controlled, while the other possible threat is revealed to be tame already. The story then ends as the matrilineage is reaffirmed when Violet swears to make more time for her daughters, and the sisters solve their differences. The family unit becomes united once more, regardless of whether or not the woodsman/veterinarian will join it. The women are strong in their own right, as the mother has shown herself able to hoist her axe in defense of her daughters, and the daughters have the fortitude and cunning to best the odds in their own ways. Though they can be helped by a man, they do not need him.

Antony and Cleopatra - 12/28

I really enjoyed this production of Antony and Cleopatra. To me, one of the most interesting aspects was the way in which Cleopatra was portrayed - as entirely apart from a noble queen. While this is definitely the general gist of the play as it is written, I believe that this particular director emphasized that aspect even more, in part through her opposition to Octavia.

Seeing this production was interesting for me, because I had seen it once before, also with a Cleopatra who fell outside of the regulations of conventional beauty. While this one could play on the mysteries of the Orient and her seductiveness, that Cleopatra was a short, stout white woman of about 50. Consequently, while she was still seductive and playful, she also carried a more queenly air because anything but would have been mockery. The director for this production, however, increased Cleopatra's un-queenly dissolution by having her ride around on Mardian's shoulders, pull a gun on the messenger, and making the scene in which she was compared to Octavia even more of a mockery.

The comparison between Octavia and Cleopatra makes Cleopatra's unfit ruling even more clear. In the text of the play, it is implied that Octavia is a lovely and sober woman. This director emphasized the dichotomy between the two even more. Cleopatra was cast as a short, thin woman of dark hair and complexion. Octavia, however, was tall, blonde, and curvaceous. While Cleopatra is always consumed by various passions, Octavia is more sedate. The differences between the two are highlighted when Cleopatra is asking about Octavia, portrayed as a sarcastic, yet frightening scene.

Bad leadership is infectious in *Antony and Cleopatra*. This becomes evident during the large party scene. Though Antony is away from the influence of his sensuous lover, he continues her dissolution. In the party, the only one to remain sober is Caesar, while his fellow Consuls

become roaringly drunk. The wrongness of the scene is compounded when Antony attempts to force Caesar to drink. The rest of the men begin to move in slow-motion, showing that Caesar is completely apart from his drunken underlings and equals. The party as being at odds with leadership is emphasized even more later on in this production, when Antony gives Cleopatra a birthday party. This scene is inserted immediately before Antony's decision to face down Caesar, and one of the most vivid shifts in the play is when Cleopatra's court moves from joyous birthday celebration to a fevered enthusiasm against Caesar.

Finally, Cleopatra is shown as a poor ruler through her anger. The not-overly-lovely actress becomes beautiful and terrible in her anger, as when the messenger tells her of Antony's marriage to Octavia. It is in her viciousness that the true queenly qualities shine through. One can understand Antony's attraction to her at that point, but she does not portray a good ruler still. She is beautifully impassioned, but impulsive in her anger. She abuses the power of her station, an act which Antony echoes when he has another messenger whipped for kissing his mistress's hand. Similarly, Cleopatra shows her nobility in her death scene. While her death is portrayed as noble, it is also one of the only times she actually exercises her power.

This portrayal of Cleopatra showed a sensuous, strangely beautiful woman completely governed by her passions. She is capricious, always shifting her temper and her desires. She is not portrayed, either by Shakespeare or this particular actress, however, as the powerful ruler of the Nile that she must have been.

Warhorse - 12/29

I thought that *Warhorse* was incredible! Having ridden horses for about 6 years of my childhood, I was intensely impressed by the puppet-work in the horses. They looked and sounded so incredibly lifelike. Obviously, an intense amount of time went into studying horses' movement, behaviors, and sounds so that the actors could be trained accordingly. It was also amazing to me how they actually instilled Joey and Tophorn with distinct personalities. Even their appearances were different: with Joey being shorter and stockier, it was obvious that he had some draft horse blood as well as thoroughbred. Overall, the use of the animal puppets in the play fascinated me.

Other than horses, the only animals to be used as puppets were birds. All three types of birds used had extremely different purposes and mechanisms. The play begins with a few circling song-birds, interestingly echoed in *Birdsong's* opening background sounds. The next bird introduced into the play is the goose that lives on the family's farm. This goose is given almost as much personality as the horses have, as it pecks the drunken father and serves as comic relief each time the door gets slammed into its beak. Finally, crows or ravens are introduced in the second act. As the first act began with songbirds, the second begins with crows, picking at a dead body. Rather than flying free on long staves, the crows are closer to the puppeteers' bodies, and they spend most of their time on stage pecking at dead humans or horses. This effect intensifies the shift from the childish training and conflicts of the better part of the first act to the horrific war-imagery of the second.

Then, of course, there are the horses. I am most interested in their interactions with each other. Joey and Tophorn have two instances at which they touch each other. At the first, they are fighting. Joey bites Tophorn on his neck, and Tophorn kicks Joey. There is a face-off of

dominance, in which both stallions put on impressive displays. Neither comes out a clear winner, however, though they obviously have gained respect for each other. At the second point, Topthorn falters after drawing the heavy cart. Joey tries to pull his fellow horse up in a gesture that mimics the fight scene. He grabs his friend's neck just above the withers, where he had bitten him earlier. Joey does not manage to save his friend in the end, but he keeps Topthorn from collapsing at that moment and makes a valiant attempt.

The interaction between the horses provides an interesting mirror later in the play. At one point, Joey comes in contact with a tank. The tank is obviously not living, but its construction was extremely close to that of the horses. The tank moves with an up-and-down gait, suggesting primarily a bumpy landscape, but also echoing the canter of the horse. When the tank and Joey come face to face, the tank rears up as a horse would in a display of dominance. At first, Joey rears as well, but then he finally is intimidated by the immense machine and he runs off. Unlike the power play between the horses, in this instance there is a clear victor. Mankind's horrors terrify even this most noble of horses.

The puppets in *Warhorse* were part of the reason that the play was so incredible. Through the interactions of the puppets, the theme of the horror of war was demonstrated. When interacting with each other, the two horses acted as horses should in two very different contexts. When mankind's cruel influence enters, however, Joey cannot act as the brave horse he is anymore. Joey was given a distinct personality in this play, that of a loving and peaceful horse of indomitable will. The masterful puppeteers put these personality traits into his every realistic movement, as they did with all of their other puppets. They made this horse, his compatriots, and the other animals and objects of the play come to life and shine as much as their human counterparts.

Birdsong - 12/29

I must admit, I was not a fan of *Birdsong*, though there were several aspects that I found technically very interesting. What I did not like about the play was the odd balance between emotional situations I empathized with and characters with whom I didn't. I felt that much of the characterization fell flat, in part due to dialogue, and in part due to too many threads being pulled into the plot. I thought that much of the back-story added little to the plot, instead only adding many dead ends. Because of my empathy for the general situations of unrequited love, despair in war, the brotherhood of men, etc, however, the third act had me constantly near tears. I found that the disconnect between the heart-wrenching situations and the flat, yet overly-complicated characters created a mental state that was disconcerting at best, and not in the way proper to a disturbing war production.

What I did enjoy about the play was much of the staging. I really did enjoy the fact that much of the play was done in monologue, couched either as a diary entry or a letter. I found this particularly fascinating because the director capitalized on the Renaissance convention of monologues occurring at the front of the stage. I felt as though this was particularly effective to illuminate the character's inner struggles, since they were often too convoluted to put into dialogue! The monologues as letters and diaries also continued a general theme of writing which infused the whole play. One of the most effective uses of writing was the soldiers' letters. Jack and his best friend shared Jack's letters as a bonding experience, showing the ways in which human communication and the human condition can bring men closer to each other.

Another aspect of the presentation which I found fascinating was the scenery, especially when compared to that used in *Warhorse*. In *Warhorse*, the scenery was extremely minimal, and most of it was carried by actors. The actors themselves became scenery as they supported not

only the horses, but the fences and other small objects. The rest of the scenery, when not implied by the stage itself, was left to the audience's imagination. In *Birdsong*, however, the scenery was much more elaborate. While *Warhorse* had occasional projected imagery, in *Birdsong*, the backdrops were entirely projected and crucial to understanding the setting of the play. The director also used much more elaborate settings to create an officer's tent in the trenches and a setting for extensive tunnels. I had mixed feelings about this elaborate staging. While it helped to keep the elaborate settings clear, I think it also made the stage a little over-crowded. Leaving more to the imagination can often be quite effective. I did like the way in which it was used for the tunnel scenes, however. The tiny passage-way and the small entrances were very effective at conveying the claustrophobia that the men must have felt in the tunnels.

In the end, I felt as though the play fell quite flat, despite several very interesting stylistic choices on the part of the director and set-designer. I think the play was particularly ineffective because we saw *Warhorse* in the same day. While any two plays seen in close proximity will inevitably be compared to some degree, the fact that both involved World War I, deep emotions, and a generous view towards opposing sides led to much more detailed associations. Since I found *Warhorse* to be so incredible, *Birdsong* was made even less compelling.

Once Bitten – 12/30

“In these cases, chance is very seldom pure.” The farce *Once Bitten* contains this line near the beginning, and this perspective seems to represent much of the rest of the play. The farce works because of the seemingly seldom chances which pile up towards the point of absurdity. As the director said at the discussion period after the play, this play needed a very long introductory segment in order to put into motion all of the chances which made the play so funny. This allowed the audience to anticipate the absurd twists, though not always to anticipate just what they would be. For example, it was obvious that something would go wrong with the invention of the name “Vauradiex case,” but it was not immediately obvious that it was referring to a real criminal case, nor that the real criminals would become entangled with the hapless lawyers. The idea of pure chance not existing is supported by the way in which characters have multiple points of entrance and exit, and can use those points to narrowly avoid confrontation.

One other interesting aspect of the play was one way in which the two acts were tied together. Act I ends with the maid shrieking “vengeance,” while the second ends with the mother-in-law proclaiming that there is “peace at last.” This dichotomy highlights the fine line between tragedy and comedy in the play. Someone mentioned in the discussion period that farce is actually the flip side of tragedy, not an aspect of comedy. I believe that comment is enlightening, because at many points over the course of the farce, there is potential for tragedy. If at any point, the various lovers discover their competition more overtly, the play could become violent. There is even a slight current of mocked violence running throughout the play, in the form of the dog. First, nearly every major character ends up with a bloody hand as the dog bites them. Then, the dog itself is killed. The mistress first allows for her anger to erupt when she yells to just kill the damn dog. Then, the lawyer in fact carries out his anger and kills the dog. If

a dog can be killed so easily, one must wonder if other characters of the play have such easy violent impulses. With the dog's death, there is the threat of other death as characters nearly discover the depths of their mutual deceptions.

Another theme running through the play was that of the narcoleptic uncle. I think that he was a very interesting representation of how people can delude themselves. Any time the other characters did not want him to catch on to something, they simply had to force him into a seated position. This allowed for the deceptions and confusions to continue beyond even the already unreasonable limits proposed by the world of the play. In a way, it reminds me of Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*, and the way in which January is made blind by his willingness to be deceived. To a point, the other characters "fall asleep" as well, as they do not immediately notice each others inconsistencies. One of the characters least likely to do this is in fact the mother-in-law, for the very reasons that her son-in-law so hates her. She is a suspicious woman, which makes her realize that the second lawyer is leading her on with his supposed tongue paralysis. In fact, it is her daughter, absent from the better part of the play, who first notices the inconsistency. The characters who can force themselves awake are then able to begin unraveling the confusing twists of fate, while the uncle remains in the dark.

Though I did not really have an all-encompassing theme for the discussion of this play, I did find many aspects of it extremely interesting. I found the use of chance and fate effective, and that use was augmented by the unusual staging. I really enjoyed the play between comedy and tragedy in the play, and the way in which the tragic threat overshadowed the humor. I also found the uncle's narcolepsy, while comical, a good illustration of the way in which all of the characters became deluded in the course of the farce.

## The Glass Menagerie – 12/30

I enjoyed this production of *The Glass Menagerie* a lot, though it differed from my original understanding of the play in several ways. One of the biggest differences I noticed was the way in which the various flaws were played up through the characters' speech patterns and physical mannerisms, almost to the point of absurdity. Overall, I very much enjoyed the way in which this director played up the flawed aspects of all of the main characters, though at times it was at odds with what I felt that the play was trying to convey.

The first thing I noticed about this production was the fact that Tom had a lot of bizarre tics, such as jerky head and hand movements as he spoke. To my memory, this was not in the original text of the play, nor was it indicated in my edition's<sup>1</sup> description of various conventional staging methods. I felt as though this technique was both effective and not. In one way, I really liked it because it emphasized Tom's difference from the rest of society. My impression from the text itself was that he was so alienated simply because of his poetic, dreaming nature, and because of his wish for something more than attempting to work his way up the corporate ladder. His slight physical off-ness, however, emphasized the way in which he was a "special" child like his sister, as I believe his mother called them. However, in a way this also detracted from the narrative for me. Part of the point of the play was that everyone has problems and some people just magnify their own more. However, I still felt when reading it as though Tom was the most normal and relatable character, made rebellious only by his unfortunate situation. His more obviously alienating defects make this portrayal as an everyman much more difficult.

Laura was also much more exaggerated than I had originally imagined her. In my copy of the text, the production notes said that often, Laura's physical defects are often played down

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<sup>1</sup> Tennessee Williams. *The Glass Menagerie*. Intro Robert Bray. Sewanee Tennessee: The University of the South, 1973.

in order to emphasize the way in which she fixates on aspects of herself which barely exist. In this production, however, Laura walks with an extremely prominent limp, her leg often seeming unbendable until she sits down. These gestures are even more emphasized by the actress's tendency to clutch at her upper thigh as she walks. I feel as though this latter gesture was too much, considering that it emphasizes the mental nature of her illness when the physical was already so evident. I think it would have been more effective if she walked more freely, but grabbed her leg as though she were in pain, despite little obvious physical discomfort.

I was also surprised by her apparent speech-defect. While I remember her stammering a bit in the text due to nervousness, this portrayal exacerbated her stutter to an actual condition. It was so bad that it actually put me in mind of the stutterer in *Pan's Labyrinth*. Again, I felt as though the overemphasis of her flaw was too much for her character. Without such a pronounced speech defect, one can imagine that only her perceived handicap and her overbearing mother created her timid personality. With even more problems heaped on, however, she becomes more hyperbolic and, as in the case of Tom, less of a character one can empathize with.

The one character whose portrayal I really did enjoy was Amanda. While her flirtatiousness and tendency to live in the past were definitely emphasized, I felt as though they had more grounding in the original text and the stage directions. While her flirting was maddening, it also showed very vividly the pitiable, yet loathly figure Tom sees and narrates. I felt similarly about Jim and his egotism. Again, they were emphasized, but more realistically than with the siblings.

The director of this version of *The Glass Menagerie* emphasized the defects of the characters, both in ways implied by the text and allowed by it. I felt as though some of the

liberties taken added to the characterization, while others detracted from the everyman feeling which most American Dream material strives for in its heroes.

I thought that this was an excellent farce. I believe that I liked it even more than *Once Bitten*. My favorite aspect was that of the doppelganger, which was picked up in other aspects of the play as well. Several characters mirror each other, and the use of doors increases this occurrence. Not only does Chandebise have an actual doppelganger in Poche, but Madame Chandebise and Madame Homenides can also be seen as doppelgangers of each other. Similarly, Camille can perhaps be said to be a double of himself, based on whether or not he has his mouthpiece in. The farce is built around doubles and doppelgangers, and the settings and scenery do much to aid in that basis.

The most obvious set of doppelgangers is the unexplained pair of truly identical doubles. Unlike other “twins” in the play, M. Chandebise and Poche look identical, but are in all other ways completely dissimilar. M. Chandebise is the height of propriety, too ashamed even to discuss his lack of bodily response with his wife. Poche, on the other hand, is coarse and unrefined and does not seem to care who knows of his strange fetish for being kicked. M. Chandebise is an astute business man, while Poche is an idiotic jack-of-all-trades at the hotel. Chandebise is a sober man, while Poche gets drunk any time he can get away with it. Despite these obvious differences, the two look inexplicably identical. Because of this, when one runs on stage in the hotel and later the Chandebise house, he is inevitably mistaken for the other despite the obvious clues to the contrary. In fact, one of the funniest aspects of the farce is that none of the characters can tell their friend or acquaintance apart from his twin, even though the two differ so much in personality. This is a case in which the simplest answer truly is the best – rather than Chandebise having suddenly lost his wits, there are merely two possible Chandebises. I do believe that the lack of explanation in the end is necessary for the plot. Unlike in Shakespeare’s

*Comedy of Errors* and Plautus' various twinning plays, there is no evidence at the beginning that there are lost twins to be found. Any revelation at the end would have felt incredibly contrived, especially due to the internal disparity between the two characters. If there had been an allusion to a lost twin at the beginning, the already-complicated plot would have risked becoming too complex and unbelievable for enjoyment.

Though they are not identical in body, Mme's Chandebise and Homenides also have a twinned role in the plot. This twin-hood begins when Raymonde begs her friend to write the false love letter to her own husband. This seed sown at the beginning of the play ensures that M. Homenides assumes it is his own wife who is being unfaithful, not his friend's. Because of this, the two women are often confused for each other in terms of their place within the plot.

Camille Chandebise can be considered a double of himself because of his speech defect and its miraculous cure. Indeed, he is actually the only character who appears to have an internal life, being the only character who has dramatic monologues. Ironically, these monologues are both commented on by others as a contrivance and rendered nearly unintelligible because of Camille's strange defect. When Camille puts in his mouthpiece, he becomes practically a different character, to the point where he is unrecognized by others. He also led a dual life even before the sounding-board, as evidenced by his affair with Antoinette in the face of everyone's belief in his naïveté.

Finally, there is the effect of the scenery. Obviously, the many entrances and exits around the stage allow for misconceptions and the actual doppelgangers. In addition, there is the spinning bed in the hotel. This trick means that the old man frequently appears in place of one of the lovers, acting as an unintentional and comic double. In these ways, the physical and mental doubles of the play are supplemented by spatial doubles, adding to the comedy and confusion.

Country Girl – 12/31

Overall, I admit, I did not enjoy this performance much. I felt that the actors often either overacted or felt flat, and the script was largely trite and unrealistic. For example, Bernie tells Georgie, “To be frank, you are slightly grotesque to me, Mrs. Elgin,” in the middle of a fight. I can not imagine anyone actually calling someone “slightly grotesque” while sniping or screaming at them. I also noticed the actors’ accents slipping several times, particularly in the cases of Georgie and the internal play’s female lead. What I did find very interesting, however, was the way in which the play focused on the conventions of plays and storytelling. Because of the setup of the play-within-a-play, the audience’s consciousness was constantly drawn to the inner workings of plays, both specifically and more generally.

One of the aspects of the play that I did not enjoy was the way in which Frank delivered his more emphatic lines, namely because I was not sure if the style was intended or not. To me, it sounded as though there was no difference between Frank’s acted lines and the lines he delivered more emphatically to his fellows in the “real” world. If this was not intended, it seems to indicate that the actor had very little range of vocal expression, with many of his lines sounding somewhat forced. If the actor meant for the lines to sound this way, it would be a good technique if it were made more clear. As a character actor, Frank put his own personality into all of his characters; therefore, when his character is emphatic, it sounds as he does in every-day life. Because the similarity was not made overt, however, I felt as though this possible emphasis fell flat.

One related aspect which I found extremely well-done was the other major way in which Frank’s life and profession intersected: his compulsive and serial lying. At every stage of life, Frank is performing as he spins convincing lies to ensnare those around him. At one point, he

mentions that he can easily win people over – he does this by creating a character for himself, the man he wishes he could be. This man is the fallen hero, a man constructed from the ashes of one of his most successful roles. Rather than being a man with moderate success who always met with some failures, he transforms himself into a successful man brought down by an attempt to save his wife. Only at the end of the play do we find out that this is not at all the real Frank, and many of the weaknesses of which he accuses Georgie in fact belong to himself. Finally, the true Frank is unmasked as his assumed role is forcibly stripped from him.

In a way, Georgie is playing a part as well. By marrying Frank, she was unintentionally cast as the caretaker of the play. This role she endures with surprising fortitude. However, when Bernie tries to cast her as the villain of their interactions, she refuses to become the calumniated wife. She fights against that casting through several showdowns with Bernie and her husband, and finally wins when she reveals that in fact it is Frank who is suicidal, and who in fact invented all of the horrible things she supposedly did. In the end, she is finally able to choose what part she will play, though it is not clear to the audience what choice she will make.

The interplay between the inner and outer plays is emphasized with the directorial choices and scenery. The scene changes in this play are some of the most unapologetically blatant we've seen. Near the beginning, for example, an actor comes out and says, "Lots reset for Act 1, Scene 2." In this way, the play acknowledges its own identity as a play, since such changes occur with every scene, not just when a set in the inner play needs a change. This emphasizes the message that Frank appears to be portraying, that of the fine line between real life and acting. When everyone around you is acting a part, perhaps it can be expected that a stage crew will emerge to change the scenes around you.

## The Winter's Tale - 1/1

This was one of my favorite productions of the trip, and my favorite of the Shakespeare plays which we have seen so far. I thought that overall, the acting was excellent and many of the choices for scenery were fascinating. Perhaps the most interesting effect was the use of books throughout the play as scenery. I believe that the books were in fact a representation of nature and the natural order of the world.

Throughout most of the first half, the scene is dominated by two monstrous bookshelves. It is not actually clear from the audience whether or not all of the books are real – several people including myself thought that perhaps the upper shelves were a screen. This proved false, however, as we found out when the props malfunctioned and one of the bookcases began to fall. After many books fell, the case was finally righted before the end of the segment. We then found out why such a malfunction was possible at the end of the half when both bookcases fall askew, allowing hundreds of books to fall to the floor in heaps, scattering pages across the stage. Leontes' world collapses after he has defied nature and the Oracle. The scene on the shores of Bohemia is a craggy beach, in which books become the harsh scenery. I was extremely impressed with their portrayal of the bear. Especially after loving the sea-elemental bear created at Stratford, I was skeptical of any other portrayal. This bear, however, was a masterful puppet whose fur was composed of pages. Nature tries to take vengeance on the unnatural Sicilians. Interestingly, Antigonus does not exit "pursued by a bear," but instead is dragged by the bear after he sacrifices himself to it to save Perdita.

The use of the books and pages to represent nature is continued after the intermission. The piles of books and tipped cases are left on stage, and the stage is ringed with pages. After Time's speech, Autolychus enters through the hole in the center of the stage, through a

thatchwork of pages. He then uses this hole to hide in, continuing to incorporate the pages as natural scenery. When the scene moves to the shearing festival, trees descend from the rafters. These trees are leaved with pages, giving a new meaning to “tree of knowledge.” Perdita and Florizel frolic in the trees, at one with the natural (bookish) environment.

At the shearing festival itself, there is a shepherd’s dance. Once again, pages are used to reflect a more naturalistic element. Cast members enter covered in pages with exaggerated phalluses emerge. To me, their costumes reminded me of tribal African dancers, which was an extremely jarring image in this context for me. While I enjoyed their dance and found it another fascinating representation of the naturalistic element of literature, I felt that it was too strange to fit properly in the rest of the play. Throughout this scene, various musicians perch on the fallen piles of books as though they are rocks.

I was actually surprised because the books were not played up more at the end of the performance. Based on the stage and the scenery, I was expecting Hermione’s resurrection scene to be done quite differently. Other than dragging it out for a long time, I felt as though Hermione’s resurrection was fairly uncreative. I had expected that the director would make use of the rising centerpiece of the stage to raise Hermione out from under the “ground,” and perhaps that she would be covered in pages, which would fall off as she awoke. Obviously, this did not happen however. I did like their ending overall, though – in particular, tying Autolychus to Malvolio by shutting him out of the festivity. I just felt as though Hermione’s reappearance could have been more creative.

I was fascinated by the way in which this production used the scenery to augment the premise of the play regarding the natural and unnatural classifications imposed on various characters. The use of books throughout as staging and costuming was fascinating.

## Romeo and Juliet - 1/1

I had mixed feelings about this production of Romeo and Juliet. While I enjoyed much of it, particularly the aesthetics in scenes such as the ball, I didn't really like the way in which the producers played with the costuming. I felt as though whatever they were trying to get across with the varied time periods of clothing was too ambiguous to be effective. What I am most interested in, however, is the portrayal of the youth and youth-like qualities of many of the characters. This was prevalent in my mind in part because, when I first encountered the play in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, my teacher emphasized the way in which the entire thing was youthful folly and puppy love. I felt as though this production really emphasized that interpretation, both in the young characters and in the older ones as well.

Romeo is the first character we meet, presented as a youth listening to what seems to be a guided tour on a headset. This is the prologue. He is obviously dressed as a young man, full of angst. This is emphasized when the play actually begins when he is placed in contrast to his fellow inhabitants of Verona, all of whom are dressed in Elizabethan garb and most of whom are armed. Without a weapon with which to fight the familial battles, Romeo sticks out like a sore thumb. This impression persists as he moons about the stage, wishing for the love who scorned him. He finally goes to the ball, but is still an outsider in his hoodie and jeans.

When we first meet Juliet, she is similarly isolated by her clothes and her youthful bearing. She too is portrayed as a particularly petulant teenager, as she tries desperately to ignore her mother by spinning a toy around her head. She is dressed in a light dress and sneakers, emphasizing her youth by the relative informality and juvenile style.

When Romeo and Juliet are parted, the emphasis on their youth continues. Romeo gives Juliet his jacket, the archetypal representation of high school affections. Juliet then wears this

around her house, sulking down to breakfast while wrapped in it. When her mother brings up the question of marrying Paris, Juliet throws a temper tantrum. In this scene, however, her father is no better than she! When he learns that she wishes to defy his will, his reaction is absolutely infantile. First, he mutilates the orange he would eat, and then he advances on Juliet. Most of his lines are yelled at this point, and he throws a book around and even shakes Juliet. His reaction is rather like that of a toddler told that he cannot have candy.

At this point in the play, Juliet begins to change, however. After she is fitted for her wedding dress, she is no longer a misfit or adolescent through her costume. Then commences her marriage to Death. Her first adult act is the actual decision to take the poison – a step proving that she is willing to potentially sacrifice herself for what could otherwise be seen as an infatuation. She takes the poison, and then marries death. This is emphasized by her wearing the wedding dress during her fake death, and the contortions she makes as the poison takes hold. At various times, she seems to be writhing either in sexual ecstasy or in the agony of labor pains. Either way, she has reached a level of sexual and social maturity which she lacked earlier in the play. While Romeo's transformation is less overt, he does go from being costumed as a teenager to the more sober dress of a friar, in which garb he dies. In this way, the play can almost be seen as a coming-of-age story, though those who come of age do not live to flourish in their maturity. The cuts in the ending emphasize Romeo and Juliet's growth – by not having the families outwardly reconciled, the director implies that they have not reached the same level of maturity as their children.

Though *Romeo and Juliet* is a play about death, it is also a play about the trials of youth and growing up. One must wonder whether the lovers are truly in love, or just taking infatuation to an extreme. This production seems to play with that ambiguity through its emphasis on youth.

Hamlet – 1/2

I was not a big fan of this production. In part, that is just because I don't really enjoy Hamlet, but I also really did not like the interpretation. The director chose to emphasize the political dimensions of the play over Hamlet's personal struggle. I did enjoy some of the innovations which the director chose, but I felt as though overall, it just did not work.

One of the most interesting scenes for me was that which took place in Gertrude's apartment. First of all, I was surprised that the director chose to completely downplay the Oedipal undertones which so often come out on stage. The setting doesn't even include a bed, being set in what seems a sitting room rather than Gertrude's actual bedroom. Hamlet is aggressive against his mother, but not sexually so. What I really enjoyed, however, was when Hamlet sees his father's ghost. Usually, the text is read literally and Gertrude in fact does not see the ghost. In this production, however, Gertrude certainly sees her deceased husband. She walks towards the ghost, almost in a trance. While she walks, she crosses on top of the fallen picture of Claudius. She entirely disregards her new husband as she sees her old one, pale and incorporeal across the room. Of course, the Shakespearean dialogue is maintained – Gertrude denies seeing the ghost even as she is enrapt by it.

Another innovation of this play which I (mostly) enjoyed was the scene in which Claudius prays. Usually, this is staged in a chapel. In this case, however, Claudius is in his office. He moves around his desk and kneels before it, facing his own picture. In a way, it looks as though he has made a shrine of his own political institution. He is his own God. While I liked the symbolism of his actions, I also felt that it confused Hamlet's mercy. When the scene takes place in a chapel, it is clear that he is in fact praying to God. However, when Claudius seems to be praying to an institution or even an icon of himself, it makes much less sense for Hamlet to

stay his hand. If anything, Claudius would be destined for Hell by praying to false images and a corrupt institution, rather than being forgiven all of his sins for being murdered while at prayer for God.

Another change which I found interesting, but not too effective, was that Ophelia was executed by the government rather than committing suicide. The entire scene surrounding her capture I thought could have been carried out better. First, the rioters who assisted Laertes are escorted off-stage by armed guards. They have their hands behind their heads, and it is implied that they will be killed as insurgents. Then, Ophelia is seized by a couple more agents and escorted off as well. I disliked this interpretation for several reasons. First of all, I think that it would've been more effective to show Claudius' cruelty if one or more of the rioters had been gunned down on stage, or even if gunshots were heard after their exit. I also think that Ophelia's execution did not have the impact that the director intended. First of all, I just don't believe that it is in character for the Claudius that the director was trying to portray. It is feasible that a cruel dictator would execute people who know too much, but no one would believe a woman who is commonly known to be mad. There was no reason to get rid of her. On a more artistic level, I think that it robs Ophelia of her dignity, taking away from her the one act of her own volition in the play. Most of her actions are guided by her father or Hamlet's pursuit, and her suicide seems an expression of freedom.

While I thought that many of the changes to the usual staging of *Hamlet* were interesting, I could not fully enjoy them because they warped the meaning of the play. I love the myriad of interpretations possible for any play, there also comes a time when the director strays so far from any possible intent that it is a different work entirely. I think that this is where the director failed – he was so concerned with his new interpretation that he lost Hamlet on the way.

## Cinderella – 1/2

I absolutely adored this version of Cinderella! I do not know the original ballet, nor have I seen professional ballet in several years, but I was absolutely captivated by the beautiful music and the modernized, yet wonderfully classical dancing. What fascinated me most is the way in which the ballet made the story a dual Cinderella story involving both male and female leads, not just Cinderella herself.

The first sign that the main characters are both a type of Cinderella is when the soldier stumbles into Cinderella's house. She takes him in, but he is later forced out by her overbearing family. When he leaves, he leaves behind his hat. She uses the hat then to perform a dance, dressing up a mannequin as though it were her new-found beloved. The dance with this mannequin was actually one of my favorites, as the mannequin is quickly substituted with the actor, who pretends as though he is not truly alive, forcing her to reposition him every once in a while. Then, Cinderella must seek out her airman – the one that the hat will fit. Finally, they find each other, immediately before London is bombed.

When next the lovers meet, they are in the café and both have undergone an extreme transformation. The airman enters first. He is no longer bandaged for a head wound, and the torn garb he sports throughout the rest of the ballet is exchanged for dress blues. For one of the only times during the performance, he is truly dapper and clean. Cinderella herself has undergone a shocking change as well. She has laid aside her dowdy clothing for a shimmering fairyland of a dress. Her drab brown hair has turned into flaxen gold, marvelously coiffed. It is almost a surprise that they can recognize each other. In this case, it appears as though the fairy godfather has enacted change on all that is around him. He has rejuvenated the club after the first missile strike, and he cleans and clothes the two protagonists. After the two have some time

away from the club together, however, a second missile strike brings reality crashing down again. The fairy godfather undoes all that he had done, restoring club and protagonists to their fallen states.

Next, the airman is left with a piece of Cinderella's costume: her silver slipper. This scene mirrors the original scene in which Cinderella dances with the airman's hat. While Cinderella does not appear to take the place of the slipper, the airman dances with it and around it as though he is holding onto his lost love. He even goes so far as to try to kiss the space where her face would be. While Cinderella's original dance was largely elated with finding a new love, the airman's is more tragic, filled with sorrow and longing for the lover he lost.

The comparisons between the stories of the two lovers continue their parallels when both are sent to the hospital. Both experience healing (though what is healed is perhaps dubious in the case of the airman) at the hands of the doctor, played by the same dancer as the fairy godfather. When they finally meet again, the two still recognize and love each other, despite their transformations back into the torn and more drab people of the real world. Rather than seeing if the shoe fits Cinderella, their identification process is mutual, as they see that each one possesses a single shoe of the matched pair.

I really liked that both ended the ballet looking as they did in the beginning, though considerably more cleaned up. I feel as though that showed that while people can have projected fantasy lives, princesses and princes may be found among every-day people, even if they are not in a ball-gown or fancy suit. For this reason as well, I liked the fact that the last moment of the ballet was the fairy godfather finding another girl. Cinderella is every woman without love, waiting to be raised from the ashes of her own sorrow. Cinderella is also every man, however, waiting for a woman to make him feel like a prince.

## Beauty and the Beast – 1/3

I thought that *Beauty and the Beast* was a very interesting pantomime. I did not enjoy it as much as I did *Red Riding Hood*, mostly because I did not like the fairy emcee. Despite this, I thought that the show did some fascinating things in respect to naming and self-hood. Names are a big part of the play, and help to define the parameters of the fairy tale.

Obviously, naming is an important aspect of any story in which the main characters have descriptive names. Beauty dislikes her name, however. She tells the Beast that it is a stupid name to give to a baby girl, because no one knows whether she will indeed turn out to be a beauty or not. She complains about the idiocy of descriptive names, saying that “I’m also a marvelous swimmer, but no one calls me mackerel!” Instead, she wishes to be called Cassiopeia, after her favorite constellation. This name has interesting significance which the children of the audience would not understand, and perhaps Beauty herself didn’t even understand the full extent of her symbolism. Cassiopeia is visible all year, giving her a sense of consistency. Perhaps this steadfastness is one of the reasons that Beauty likes the constellation so much, as she values constancy and maintaining vows. However, Cassiopeia was also Andromeda’s mother and sentenced her to be eaten by a sea demon. The Greeks believed that the constellation was the chair of Cassiopeia’s punishment, in which she was sentenced to sit and hang upside-down for half the year. I doubt that Beauty knew the story, since she does not allude to it and she is not an avid reader like her Disney counterpart. While none of this symbolism is picked up in the play to my eyes, the choice of the constellation had to be intentional, and it adds a sense of foreboding to her character.

The other major named character is the Beast. After he changes form, he also takes the name of Beast to describe his fallen state. He has been lowered on the Great Chain of Being,

moving closer to the animals than to the angels. He seems to define himself by his form, and to define his actions by the way in which he perceives himself. When Beauty's father tries to give him even the appellation of Mr. Beast, he is furious. However, as he persists on calling Beauty by her given name rather than her chosen one, she too tries to find out his true name. She discovers a trunk of clothes labeled George, and realizes that George was the Beast's name before his transformation. Though he bellows at her when she tries to name him so, and repeats over and over again his name of "Beast," she refuses to call him such. Finally in the end, the Beast regains his identity as George. Beauty maintained her inner and outer loveliness throughout the play, but George needed a measure of transformation before he could truly be given a human name again.

The final use of names in the play is that of the fairies. The male fairy is given no name within the play to my memory, though he is denoted as "Mr. Pink" in the cast list. His female assistant is called Cecile. However, at the end, the two reveal that those are not in fact their real names. They are both more properly called by their fairy names, which may only be whispered. I thought that this might be connected to the tradition that one can trap a supernatural creature if their true name is discovered. Thus, they are willing to reveal it to each other out of trust, but the audience cannot know it. (Of course, on a practical level, the author may not have wanted to attempt to create fairy sounds for the non-mortal names). Through the revelation of their names, however, the fairies also seem to gain a greater affection for each other. They each comment on the loveliness of the other's name. As George recognizes his own lost identity through his name, the fairies seem to realize their love for each other through hearing the other's name. Names are extremely important in tales of the supernatural, often serving to define their bearers. This pantomime makes the most out of the naming tradition.

Priscilla, Queen of the Desert – 1/3

*Priscilla* was so much fun! I really enjoyed the way in which the stage production used the tropes of live musical theater to augment the themes of acceptance and self-expression. Live stage has possibilities on which film cannot capitalize. The over-the-top costumes and giant dance numbers really help to augment the themes of the show.

One of my favorite effects in *Priscilla* was the use of the “divas” to sing the songs that the queens were lip-synching. In a drag show, everyone understands that the female impersonators are neither truly female nor truly singers. The musical capitalized on this accepted deception by showing the audience just who was singing instead.

Possibly the most obvious device of the show was the costuming. Obviously, the costumes will be magnificent in a show about drag queens. However, this was even more amazing than I could have anticipated. In a movie, there can always be pauses and cuts while actors change costume. In this show, despite quick scene changes, there were an immense number of costume changes into fantastical garb. One of the major themes of the play is that the drag queens refuse to hide their identities or tone down their clothing. This was emphasized by the outlandish costumes that they wore, and that were given to everyone else on the set. Everyone was a caricature, but it was an effective device. The main characters always had elaborate costumes with immense hair pieces and shoes. Other characters had no less elaborate garb, however. For example, the lesbian woman at the bar was the stereotype of a butch woman to the extreme. The Aborigine man that they meet seems to explain something of the reason for this costuming. He says that he would not be wearing his loincloth if it weren't what the tourists expected to see. Perhaps the same is true for all of the other actors – they walk the fine line between trying to express themselves and trying to live up to the stereotypes to which they are

being held. Similarly adding to the acceptance of necessary showmanship, I found the microphones on all of the drag queens to be very blatant. I think that maybe they were supposed to be somewhat visible in recognition of the various parts that the men were playing.

Another way in which theatrical conventions complemented the themes of the show was through the giant dance numbers. In these, the musical was very different from my memory of the movie. In musicals, it is expected that outside people can join a scene for the sake of a chorus number. Because of this, when the men were out in the desert, a whole troop of other men in outrageous drag joined them whenever they began to sing. Movies usually try to maintain more of a sense of reality, so this trick was not used in the cinematic version to my memory. There is also an expectation of absurd and pointless props in a play of this nature. This is played on as well, with a giant shoe often being wheeled around. The musical has no illusions about its hyperbolic absurdity, and decides to play up those aspects rather than trying to hide them.

*Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, uses the intense theatricality and unreality of a musical to augment the themes of accepting oneself that are so prevalent in the story. The drag queens are unapologetic for their appearance and lifestyle choices, even when faced with bigotry. They might move on, but they do not tone down their outrageous sense of style. In the same way, the musical itself recognizes the absurd possibilities of staging a live musical, which are much different than those available to film-makers. Rather than trying to avoid the stereotypes of the genre, the musical plays them up even more with amazing costumes, flashing lights, giant set-pieces, and a randomly-appearing chorus.

## Phantom of the Opera – 1/4

I really enjoyed this production of *Phantom*. I've seen it live on Broadway in New York City three times before, once with an amazing cast and twice with a mediocre one. Though this production may not have been as good as the first one I saw, it was definitely better than the middling ones. I was not a huge fan of Christine – at first I thought her diction in her vowels was an attempt to sound French or Swedish. She definitely had the range of the character, but not necessarily the vocal style. I absolutely loved the actor playing the Phantom, however. It is about his character that I wish to focus, and the fine line between the beautiful and the grotesque.

The part of the Phantom itself is a challenging one to sing, because it requires mastery of two very different styles. On the one hand, the Phantom must be able to sing with infinitely gentle tenderness and love, as he does in “The Music of the Night.” However, he must also be able to scream his anguish in song as he does after Christine first takes off his mask, or in the final song of “Down Once More.” This dichotomy also reflects the inner conflict of the character who is torn between a wish for love and affection and a complete inability to relate to humankind. I felt that one of the actor's greatest strengths was his ability to shift from one singing style to the other as seamlessly as the character passes between affection and anger.

The lines within the Phantom's personality are mirrored on the stage in several ways. The most obvious is the Phantom's lair, both beautiful and terrifying. Perhaps the most beautiful scene in the musical is that in which the Phantom is rowing Christine through the underground lake as candles and candelabra emerge from the misty “water” beneath them. This beauty of the Phantom's underground home is complicated however, once they reach his actual lair. They are caged in, recalling Mme. Girya's story of the genius prodigy caged in the freak show. The bars which are the Phantom's last defense against invasion recall one of the lines in Priscilla, actually,

when Adam wonders if the cities were built to keep the freaks in or to protect them from the outside world. The bars both seem to afford the Phantom protection and to cage him. They give his home a more sinister aspect. Of course, the musical decided to reject some of the truly Gothic descriptions from the book, remaking the Phantom's punt as a bed rather than having him use a coffin for his rest as Leroux suggests. The beautiful and the grotesque meet in the Phantom's lair, as they do in his soul.

Interestingly, Raoul also partakes of this split personality. One part of the musical which has always bothered me actually is the scene in which Raoul concocts his plan to trap the Phantom. At first, he speaks beautiful love to Christine, telling her "You don't have to, they can't make you" in respect to her singing Aminta's role in *Don Juan Triumphant*. When he comes up with his plan, he takes on a more manic disposition, however, and tells Christine only moments after his reassurance that "Every hope and every prayer rest on you now!" Though he does not go to such violent extremes as the Phantom, Raoul's personality shifts almost as quickly as his sinister counterpart.

*The Phantom of the Opera* is a gothic book and musical, exploring the boundary between beauty and the grotesque. The Phantom, in particular, demonstrates through personality and setting the way in which that line can shift based on perspective. Other characters are caricatures, like La Carlotta, Piangi, and perhaps even Mme. Giry. These characters show just how fine the line is between lovely and horrid. The opera stars, in particular, are supposed to be the best in their professions, and yet are obviously vocally outclassed by the Phantom and his young tutee. In this play, what should be beautiful reveals itself to be ugly, and the ugly becomes oddly beautiful and compelling. Even in her terror, Christine admits that she sees both the beautiful and terrible aspects of her captor.

Midsummer – 1/4

This play was possibly my favorite of the trip, and definitely within the top three. In part, I just didn't expect such a small production to be so witty and well put together. My favorite aspect was the creative way in which it was told, blending the media of live performance, novelization, and cinema harmoniously. Because of the staging and narrative technique, the play felt much more complex than one would imagine from a production involving two people and a single, unmoving set.

The narrative manner itself was one of the best aspects of the play, in my opinion. The play opens *in medias res*, and it takes the first 10-15 minutes for a five minute scene to actually be explained as the characters interrupt each other, explain their own thoughts at the time, and backtrack to explain how things got to be in the state they were. The two also take turns in which they explain what the other character actually meant by a statement, almost serving as their compatriot's internal monologue. Bob and Helena also repeat the same lines several times, and with each repetition the audience has learned more pieces of the puzzle. Finally, once the background to the scene has been fully explained, the characters repeat the entire thing once more, but quickly, as though they are on fast-forward.

One of the truly novel-like characteristics of the play was the style of narration. The two characters did not always directly address each other; in fact, there was less dialogue than narrative. Bob and Helena took turns to narrate events, sometimes even saying "And we talked about..." without actually addressing the other character. This made for a very writing-like quality of the play, and enabled the audience to make the necessary suspensions of disbelief regarding the limited sets. For example, the two run madly towards separate destinations while in fact just standing on a separated piece of the cardboard set-front. Despite this, the two

described their relative scenes so vividly that they created a mental picture somewhat akin to scenes in *Run Lola, Run*. A sense of reality and setting is often created through narrative description rather than dialogue or elaborate sets and projections.

The play also felt very cinematic at points. Near the beginning of the play, Helena predicts that she and Bob will never get together because everyone knows that in romantic comedies, the characters begin completely at odds. Probably the most vivid example of a cinematic moment is when Bob imagines his life as a movie trailer. The lights turn blue, and Bob is isolated on stage as he acts out a one-man preview. Later on, there is a cinematic voice-over about his life as a young man.

The play also integrated other forms of drama. It is not a musical, yet there is music in it, both in the background and sung by the characters. The music is a lot of fun – while it does not narrate parts of the plot as it does in many modern musicals, the music definitely augmented the story. The songs often had slightly disturbing lyrics (such as one which begins “Give me drink, give me darkness, give me pain, then take it all away”), adding to the tension between the fun, frivolous story, and the deeper philosophies behind it. Along with musicals, *Midsummer* also ran into the genre of pantomime. The biggest audience participation moment was when members participated in the counsel of Bob by reading questions, and at one point Bob also flees through the seats. Perhaps the scene with Elmo could even be counted as a nod towards puppetry.

I think that the way in which *Midsummer* blended different forms of presentation was complete genius. The result of the different aspects was a unified whole which was constantly changing, yet intelligible. The narrative style was innovative, and allowed for the characters to shine on a very limited stage. The way in which the characters kept weaving their narratives together illustrated just how similarly-minded they were despite their differences in life.

## An Ideal Husband – 1/5

I really enjoyed Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*. One of the most interesting aspects of the play to me was the way in which expectations were defied. The Chilterns had to learn not to put each other onto pedestals, and the audience learned that Goring could defy his father's low expectations. The audience is plunged into an extremely superficial world of opulent scenery and aristocratic pretenses, but many of those pretences and expectations are quickly shattered.

The opening scenes demonstrate just how little the audience can rely on a character's expected behavior. Conversations swirl as various groups of people move around the stage, creating the feeling of mingling in the crowd. At one point, two women discuss the fact that they are both absolutely starving and they wish someone would come along to escort them in to dine. However, when someone finally comes along, they insist to their beaux that they are not at all hungry and could not eat a bite. Society expects them to act in a particular way, but their own wishes go against that. The struggle between inner wishes and society's requirements defines much of the rest of the play.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Chiltern had unrealistic expectations for their spouse, especially in the case of Mrs. Chiltern. She believed that her husband was an ideal one: a man of impeccable morals who could never deceive her in any way. She puts immense pressure on him, telling him that, "I will love you always because you will always be worthy of love. Women needs must love the highest when we see it." However, the audience learns that, in fact, he gained the immense wealth by which he had been supporting his family and doing good deeds, through an initial blackmail plot of indistinct description. He seems to have had the best of intentions, but that does not excuse his white-collar crime. When Mrs. Chiltern learns of his deception, she is

distraught as her world comes crumbling down and the saint she believed she married reveals himself to be merely another flawed mortal man.

Mr. Chiltern is also gravely injured by his revelation to his wife. He knows the high standards to which Mrs. Chiltern holds him, and realizes how grave an error he has committed to lose her regard. He comments that she is merciless in her perfection – though he seems to have known about this ruthless capacity in her, forgiveness and mercy are usually prime values for people of strong moral character. Then, Mr. Chiltern believes that she has again defied his expectations when he comes across her letter to Goring begging for his comfort. He interprets it to refer to himself, despite Mrs. Cheveley attempts to imply otherwise. He believes that she has forgiven him and now wishes his forgiveness in return. Though the letter originally had other intentions, Mrs. Chiltern is too relieved that it was not misconstrued in a more destructive manner to argue. When the truth about the intended recipient is finally revealed, there is in fact no loss of faith in the other. Mr. Chiltern recognizes his wife's chastity, and she realizes that he is sincere in his belief. Though they both suffered from putting the other in the position of an idol, they had reason to maintain some amount of faith.

The other character who defies expectations in a major way is Goring. His father constantly disparages him for his laggard ways and lack of moral fiber. He himself implies that truth is not always necessary, and says that deep thought rarely is. Despite these expectations, he is revealed as perhaps the most morally upright character of the play. He early on encourages Mr. Chiltern to tell his wife the truth, saying that a spouse is actually the only person who should never be lied to. Later on, when Mrs. Chiltern is the one hiding things, he tells her that she too should reveal her secrets. This morally bankrupt man is in fact that only advocate of complete honesty throughout the play, defying both his father's expectations, and seemingly his own.

## The Rivals – 1/5

One of the earliest statements in *The Rivals* is when Sir Anthony Absolute tells Mrs. Malaprop that “Thought does not become a young lady.” Throughout this highly entertaining play, the question of thought and its relationship to the written word is explored. Writing is a major concern of the play, from the illicit novels enjoyed by Lydia to Mrs. Malaprop’s misinterpreted missives.

Sir Anthony Absolute and Mrs. Malaprop speak near the beginning of the play of the evils of the town’s library. Sir Anthony tells Mrs. Malaprop that he believes that “A circulating library in a town is like an evergreen tree of evil knowledge.” This statement speaks to the fear of the period that women were being misled and corrupted by the increasing number of sentimental and non-educational novels available to them. Lydia herself recognizes the way that her elders will judge her guilty pleasure – she goes to great lengths in the attempt to hide all of the books her maid borrows on her behalf, and is sure to put more appropriate reading conspicuously around her room. Despite the fear of novels’ corrupting influence, Lydia obviously benefits from them to some degree. Her aunt, obviously not such a reader as her young charge, consistently misuses the language which she can so accurately pronounce. Lydia, however, understands the meanings of words along with their pronunciation, perhaps from seeing so many words in context during her reading.

Another major instance of the written word in the play is Mrs. Malaprop’s correspondence with O’Trigger. She writes to him in flowery, if not always accurate, language, sending her missives through Lydia’s maidservant. The maid delivers them faithfully, though she makes sure to profit on both sides of the deal. What she does not reveal to O’Trigger, however, is the fact that the letters come from the heavy-set and aging Mrs. Malaprop, not her

young and beautiful niece. The verbal ambiguity of the letters combined with Mrs. Malaprop's assumption of a *nom de plume* allow O'Trigger to believe what he wants, namely that it is in fact the lovely Lydia who fell madly in love with him. When he finally discovers the truth, O'Trigger is devastated by the initial revelation, as is Mrs. Malaprop with the knowledge that he has no feelings for her other than repulsion. In the end the two are reconciled as O'Trigger accepts his bachelor fate and Mrs. Malaprop realizes who her true admirer is, but as in the case of books, the written word holds the possibility for both good and evil.

The final instance of the written word in the play is the correspondence between Captain Jack Absolute and Lydia. Once again, there is verbal ambiguity and the possibility for disaster, though their correspondence ends more happily than that between Mrs. Malaprop and O'Trigger. Jack is nearly in trouble when Mrs. Malaprop intercepts his letters through the maid's efforts. Luckily, he also was writing under his pseudonym of Ensign Beverly, so Mrs. Malaprop does not immediately realize that it was he who called her "the old weather-beaten she-dragon," and mocked her abuses of the English tongue. When she finally discovers his deception, it is actually the latter insult that is more grievous in her mind. In a world of shifting linguistic meaning, Mrs. Malaprop cannot bear the thought that she is adding to the deception, however unintentionally.

*The Rivals* is essentially a play about misunderstandings and linguistic ambiguity.

Though the written word is supposed to be more concrete than that which is spoken because of its lasting power, the playwright complicates that idea through his demonstration of the ways in which text can be interpreted or misinterpreted for both good and evil. Though the play ends happily, the threat posed by the ambiguity of language, both spoken and on paper, remains. I thought that this play was really fun, and one of the reasons I enjoyed it so much was the clever linguistic play and misunderstanding.

## Men Should Weep – 1/6

I really enjoyed *Men Should Weep*, for many reasons. I really liked the ambiguity of the characters, and the way in which the play was used to demonstrate how a person's experiences can change them for better or worse. However, the characters were not all human. One of my favorite aspects of the play was the way in which the tenement building itself took on a persona, affecting the people living within it as much as they affected each other.

Near the end of the play, Jenny says that, "This house is rotten." Indeed, the house acts as an infection throughout the play, ensuring that its inhabitants cannot escape. The way that the play was staged really added to the effect of the building being its own character. Though the stage featured the house of the Morrisons, the audience could also see slivers of at least two other apartments around them, possibly three. Interestingly, the owner of the top rightmost room was never explained, though a woman changes and a man sleeps in it over the course of the play. The audience also gets to see parts of the lives of the Morrisons' neighbors across the hall and above them. There is not much visible in the apartment of the people across the hall, though the audience can often hear the woman's husband yelling for her. More is seen in the apartment above, where the woman is physically victimized by her husband. Maggie uses a broom to tap the ceiling of her apartment both to try to get their neighbors to quiet down and to call her friend down to talk.

The house is also a character in the ways in which it has direct impacts upon the lives of the Morrisons. The most overt effect of the house is Bertie's tuberculosis. While it is not clear that he contracted the disease because of the conditions in which he had to live, Jenny tells her mother in no uncertain terms at the end of the play that Bertie could never return to the house

because of its unsanitary conditions and lack of hot water. It is actually amazing that none of the other family members catch the tuberculosis, since they are living in such close quarters.

The close quarters of the house is the other major way in which it affects the lives of its inhabitants. The play revolves in part around the ways in which people are moved around the apartment. Granny Morrison is distraught because she has to be sent away to her daughter-in-law Lizzie's house, but there is just not enough room in the Morrisons' apartment all of the time. When she is there and Isa and Alec arrive unexpectedly, there end up being three women sharing the same bed. The middle daughter shares the bed with Isa, and when Jenny gets home, she too goes into that bed. There is also the concern of John and Maggie, who have a pallet which they move onto the kitchen floor at night. At one point, Maggie mentions that eventually, they will move somewhere where they can have a real bed.

Furthermore, the apartment has a role as the woman's domain. The entire play deals with gender dynamics, complicated even more than usual by the depression which prevents the men from finding work. Though they can't work, they still feel as though they need to go out and try, rather than helping their sorely overworked wives in the home. Because it is the subject of so many arguments, the apartment acts as a catalyst for the tension between the male and female characters of the play. The apartment almost acts as another child to Maggie – she has to clean up her children as well as keep the house neat and do the dishes. During most of the biggest arguments, such as the final conflict between Alec and Isa, the order of the apartment is destroyed.

In the end, Jenny offers the Morrisons a way to get out of the evil influence of the tenement building. It was a large part of the reason that each character developed as they did, and had so much trouble getting out of the role life cast for them.

## Julius Caesar – 1/6

I really enjoyed this production of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*; I think it was my favorite Shakespeare out of the ones we saw. *Caesar* is, in essence, a political play. This director, as all others for the play, faced the challenge of creating an entire Roman society out of a single cast, large but not absurdly so. In order to do this, he supplemented the play's own rhetorical genius with a brilliant set design and excellent choreography.

The set was one of the ways in which the director managed to give the illusion of a multitude to the set. The stage was divided into an upper screen and a lower set of screens. The upper screen provided a context for the various scenes. One of my favorite uses of the projection was for the collapse of Caesar's statue during the thunderstorm. It is not clear that this happens in the text, and the crumbling colossus reminds me of the destruction of one of the great wonders of the ancient world, perhaps the Colossus of Rhodes. This imagery of destruction added to the myriad omens foretelling Caesar's downfall. I also liked the burning of Rome during the mob scene. Again, it is not explicit in the text that Rome is burning, but the projection shows the way in which Rome destroys itself through factions.

The lower screens were also extremely important for demonstrating the wide-spread political dimensions of the play. On the lower screens, people were most often projected. Thus, with only seven or eight real people, the staging created the illusion of a mob. One of the most interesting aspects of the screens to me was that they were in fact the same image projected multiple times, not even separate images. Thus, if one examines one of the mob scenes, the observer will notice the same people making the same gestures on six different screens (or however many there were). Rather than adding to the artifice of the scene, I believe that this device was intentional and clever. In a mob and an army, there are not individuals. Both types

of mass settings that the screens were used for are in fact supposed to be homogenous. Though obviously the same people are not repeated in a real mob, people with the same gestures and intentions are. As the burning Rome seemed to be a metaphor for the political conflagration, the sameness and repetition of the lower screens shows the way in which the Romans were a single entity that could easily be swayed in one direction or another.

The other major way in which the director created the illusion of a large community was through the living soldiers. In part, this illusion was also aided by the screens and the centurions who appeared on them during the battle scenes. However, the choreography of the battles was also extremely important for such an optical illusion. When the battle began and the first army entered the stage, all of the extra actors moved as one, performing jerky and uniform motions. This mimicked the precisely-commanded motions of a true Roman warrior. Once they reached the battlefield, the single army split into two indistinguishable ones, demonstrating the way in which brother fought brother because of Rome's internal strife. A battle scene cannot effectively be carried out with merely seven or eight people, however. After the men fought each other, they then turned around and fought an intricately choreographed battle with phantom enemies. Perhaps the single fighting force was symbolic of the way in which the fight had truly come out of nothing other than egoism and pipe dreams. The three ways in which the army moved was an effective technique for demonstrating Roman military cohesion and the folly of the battle itself.

*Julius Caesar* is an intensely political play. It is in fact more about Rome than any one character, and definitely is a play larger than its titular character who dies within the first half of the play. This particular production managed to completely surpass the constraints of a live stage, however, using special effects, optical illusions and genius choreography to imply many more people than were in the cast.

## The Master Builder – 1/7

I cannot say that I enjoyed this play, but I did find it interesting in several ways. Unlike many others in the class, I really was not engaged by the characters and their struggles, and all of the plot-twists I found fairly predictable. What I did find interesting, though, was the way in which Ibsen built on the old theme of Faust in his text, and the director through his staging. This play is a modern retelling of Faust without either God or Satan playing a tangible role.

The elements of the Faust story did not become clear to me until Halvard and Hilde begin to discuss their pasts. Hilde brings their conversation to the realm of the supernatural. Her life seems to have been built around a fairy tale she created for herself involving Halvard, in which he alternately seems to take the role of saving prince and marauding troll. As a troll, he is cast as one who is always yearning for the treasure he can never achieve. She also tells him that he should be the only Master Builder, elevating his knowledge to the level of the numinous. In this action, she makes him the Faust-like possessor of arcane knowledge. There can only be one Master Builder and his apprentice, because arcane knowledge cannot be shared. Adding to the mystical nature of Halvard's knowledge is the fact that he did not learn it through conventional channels, barring him from the true title of "architect." Rather than going through the modern channel of school, he uses an older paradigm to gain his knowledge.

Because of Hilde's flights of fancy, Halvard seems to gain the courage to reveal his innermost thoughts to her. He tells her that he feels haunted by demons and familiars, summoned by his intense will. He uses the term demon in the older, non-religious sense of the world, including both evil and good spirits. He says that some people in the world can just summon them so, and is not sure whether Hilde falls into that category or is a summoned minion herself. He also says that he was cursed by God, and had sold his soul to the devil. He says that

he realized that God would never be satisfied with his work, no matter how many churches he built up however high. He gets his real start as a house builder after his own house is destroyed: “I have paid for [my career] with my soul.” Halvard feels that his house burned down because of his intense wish for its destruction, initiated by his familiars and evil demons. He also feels that he is leaving an enslaved state to God, much as Lucifer fell in *Paradise Lost*. And as in the case of Satan and Eve, freedom and knowledge are followed by damnation.

The most Faust-like aspect of this play was probably Hilde’s relationship with Halvard. Faust’s deal with Mephistopheles was that after he achieved perfect happiness, his soul would be forfeit. While Halvard achieved a modicum of greatness, he was by no means happy until Hilde arrived. As with Faust, he needed more and more new attempts to find pleasure and happiness. Finally when he finds Hilde, he sees what he has been missing. He decides to climb the tower while he and Hilde are in passionate embrace, interrupted only by Alina, as always. Once he gains that moment of perfect happiness and sees the promise of happiness in the future, he can no longer exist in the world. He then climbs the tower, of both happiness and of his new house, and is taken down. It is unclear whether this is God’s wrath for building too high, or Satan claiming what is his own. In the Faust myth, pure love of Marguerite saves Faust’s soul in the end. We do not in fact know if Hilde’s cry of ecstasy at the end is because she realizes that he has been saved, or because she in fact was an evil demon sent to call back his soul on the Devil’s behalf. Either way, she has captured his soul with her emphatic, “Mine!”

Adding to the many folk motifs of this play is that of Faust – the master of arcane knowledge, destroyed in the pursuit for perfect happiness. No man can strive for reaching the Godhead without falling. Halvard must fall upon reaching his state of happiness in Hilde’s love.

Deathtrap – 1/8

I absolutely loved *Deathtrap*, and I thought that it was the perfect ending for this trip. I feel as though so many of the conventions of both the plot and the staging of *Deathtrap* echoed other things I have written about over the course of the trip. Even more so than the straight comedies I discussed, *Deathtrap* played with the fine line between comedy and tragedy. This play also deals with the theme of a play within a play, and the line between reality and fiction. I thought that *Deathtrap* was immensely clever, and it succeeded in bringing me to the extremes of both suspense and laughter.

I had earlier discussed the tragic possibilities of a comedy in terms of the farce, *A Flea in Her Ear*. This play explores that theme's converse – the comic possibilities within the tragic. The entire play is riddled with deaths, both real and acted out. Despite this, the majority of the play is spent in laughter. This tone is first set when Sydney and Myra joke about the possibility of Sydney attacking and killing his young rival, Clifford. Though they joke about it, however, both recognize the possibility of murder in Sydney's character. This juxtaposition of the possible and impossible is one of the ways in which humor is found in the play.

Another source for humor is the over-the-top way in which much of the violence is carried out. The play makes much of the clichés of murder mysteries, horror, and the gothic. This technique is used effectively when Clifford begins to tell Sydney and Myra about the woman he called. The murder victim always tries to convince the murderer that he will be missed, and is not in fact the abandoned loner he appears. Sydney pretends to be taken in by this, acting as though the possibility of murder was a mere joke. When he then gets Clifford to admit that it was in fact an artistic lie, however, Sydney can continue with the fake murder. One of the most comic scenes for me was when first Sydney and then Clifford has the other at their

mercy. One of the most mocked conventions of suspense-based plots, whether it be a James Bond movie or a superhero story, is the villain's speech. Invariably, the villain must brag about his genius in capturing the hero before he kills him. Each artist needs someone to appreciate them, and villains are no different. However, this convention inevitably allows for the hero to break his confines, for his assistant to arrive, or for him to figure out some other way in which he can defeat the villain. Because of this well-known convention, the archetypal villain's speech took on comic dimensions as the audience's suspense grew, knowing that the oppressed in each situation would figure out an escape as his foe bragged on about his own genius. The means of the murders also took on comic dimensions through violent hyperbole. Perhaps one of the funniest scenes for me was when Sydney removed the crossbow from the wall. Of course, on a set covered in ancient weaponry, it was expected that something crazy would be used, but at that point only standard daggers and pistols had been handled (along with a trick garrote). My reaction to the crossbow was laughter because of the sheer impossibility of a modern person being murdered with an ancient crossbow. Thus, through exaggerating the conventions of murder and suspense, the play's violence took on comic dimensions.

Another aspect of *Deathtrap* I loved was the way in which it explored the line between reality and theater. This theme also was a major aspect of both *Country Girl* and *Hamlet*. What I found so clever about it in *Deathtrap* though was the return of the comic hyperbole. The first instance in which reality and theater is questioned is when Clifford's death is staged. This acting raises the question of whether *Deathtrap* can in fact be produced: if the plot is so convincing that Myra's heart attack was induced through it, could it not be similarly moving, though less fateful, for a stage audience? In fact it could, judging by the gasps heard around the real audience as Clifford was apparently violently garroted. This line between reality and acting continues as the

characters put on a show for their concerned neighbors, and then each other. Sydney tricks Clifford into allowing him a possible self-defense motive by asking him to test a stage-fight between two men of unequal strength. Sydney manages to get past Clifford, proving the verity of the scene, but he is scratched and his clothes are torn, allowing him a convincing act for the authorities he plans to call in. Perhaps the final nail in the coffin with regard to the humorous, hilarious line between reality and acting is the scene between Helga and Porter. They both realize the same thing that Clifford and Sydney did – the stage potential of the “true” set of events. They then proceed to enact the same tragedy, feeling the jealousy of unequal collaborators and finally taking up weapons before the lights cut off.

*Deathtrap* picked up many other themes from the trip, also including the trope of the aging artist, complicated sexual power struggles, and the use of prophesy in an otherwise believable (or at least not magical) world. I will end my discussion of this play however, not with ten more pages of explanation, but with the thought that I felt this play a wonderful culmination of our experience. I had an amazing time on the trip overall, and thought that *Deathtrap* was one of the most fun and innovative plays we saw.