

Danielle Wedde
Theatre in England Journal
Selected Entries

***Once Bitten* by Alfred Hennequin and Alfred Delacour**
Directed by Sam Walters
Orange Tree Theatre
2:30 p.m.

This French farce centers on a struggling lawyer Fauvinard, his sweet but passive wife, his overbearing mother-in-law, his mistress Cesarine, and his friend Tardivaut. In addition to the writing and the plot of *Once Bitten*, the movement of the entire cast of actors in the space, the timing of the comedy, the stage manager's use of sound effects, and the successful build-up of *anticipation* for certain comedic moments created a most effective production.

While Fauvinard and the other central characters' successes are critical to the comedy, the secondary characters, including the Maid, the Cook, Fauvinard's narcoleptic uncle, and even Cesarine's poodle, added a significant dimension to the comedy. The Maid, for example, had a great deal of difficulty relaying messages to Fauvinard because she could not remember the names of the callers who had come to the door. As she tried to pronounce the names and remained stuck half way through her speech, her frustration with delivering the message along with Fauvinard's frustration in receiving it, created a roar of laughter throughout the audience. Why does the audience find this difficulty of messages so comedic? Not only did it just "sound funny" when the Maid tried to pronounce and remember the various names, but also every time she entered, one began to expect her to repeat her difficulty in relaying the message and wondered whether or not she would finally get it correct. This anticipation was built with the repetition of

similarity in each scene. The doorbell would ring, and shortly after she would run in from the same corner entrance (whereas the other actor would alternate between the four corner entrances). The *expectation* of her comedic scene would often cause the audience to begin laughing before she even had begun to speak. This element of repetition was also used with Fauvinard's mother-in-law. Every time she began to suspect and accuse Fauvinard (unfounded suspicion or not), she would yell "don't lie to me!" This phrase became increasingly comedic as the actress began to pause before saying it which heightened the anticipation. Similarly to the anticipation built by the entrance of the Maid, one wondered whether or not Fauvinard's mother-in-law would, on the off-chance lighten up, or most likely say "don't lie to me!" When the uncle is about to sit down, he teases the audience at one point by sitting down half-way and then standing up again because he has already built the audience's expectation that he will fall asleep, and thus it is inevitable that he will, but the timing of his narcolepsy remains uncertain. It could happen either at an opportune time or a very awkward time – and of course, his narcolepsy happened sitting in between Fauvinard and his mistress Cesarine when they are trying to have an important conversation.

The comedic success of this production makes one wonder about the general elements of any farce and how they are at work. The Maid's broken communication and undelivered messages echo larger themes of miscommunications, mix-ups, and mistaken identities in the farce. For example, instead of revealing his true identity, Fauvinard introduces his friend Tardivaut as a homeopath to Cesarine, and both men eventually masquerade as doctors. However, when Tardivaut must be questioned, Fauvinard makes up a ridiculous story about Tardivaut's paralyzed tongue, so when it comes time for him

to reveal the truth about himself and Fauvinard, he is unable to speak and the miscommunication continues. In fact, rather than confronting the said truth of his identity and confronting his mother-in-law, Fauvinard ends up disguising himself as a woman. It creates a rich and intricate tapestry of mix-ups to evade awkward encounters, but in reality this only leads to increasingly awkward scenarios. Due to the letter, the mother-in-law is mistaken as the jewel thief and Fauvinard's lover, and when the police arrive everyone's identities are so mixed up, that no one is who they say they are and the police believe that the true identities of the characters are different than either reality or the identities that the characters claim. There is even a mix-up with the poodle. After the Cook kills the poodle to stop its yapping, the audience knows that the poodle is dead because Cesarine brings out (unexpectedly) a stuffed animal! However, the mother-in-law thinks it is still alive because she is bitten from under the table (even though it is actually Fauvinard under the table). The tapestry of mix-ups is so intricate at this point, that it almost seems impossible for truth and resolution to work itself out. Because of the characters' embarrassment and continued avoidance of the truth, it seems unlikely that anyone will fess up to their crimes, lies, and accidental deceptions. Thus, truth can only be restored after a spy overhears the truth. Indeed, this reconciliation device is used to reconcile Fauvinard's divorce clients (the husband hides behind the couch and overhears the wife dishing to Fauvinard, and the mother-in-law hides under the desk to overhear Fauvinard). While certainly the weaving and unwinding of *Once Bitten's* tapestry of events is a far stretch from the mix-ups of every day life, one can empathize with the feelings of awkwardness the characters have in these situations. A farce amplifies human

situations of deceiving and being deceived (intentionally or unintentionally), which perhaps makes the plot inherently “funny” to an audience.

As in the discussion with the director following the show, the use of doors and space are critical to any farce. The Orange Theatre had a unique set-up of a round house with the audience situated very near to the actors. Particular to this production, the doors were imaginary in each corner of the theatre. As with the case of the Maid, this allowed the audience to sometimes anticipate a particular character’s entrance before the other characters. Also, the use of doors in a farce in general seems to help keep the pace of the play. It allows there to be a great amount of movement increasing the “speed” of the play, and it also allows for a reasonable scenario of specific characters to be isolated together at specific times which aids the plausibility of many of the mix-ups. It also allows for strange yet comedic juxtapositions of events on and off stage. For example, there was a moment where the Cook is off stage getting bitten by the viscous poodle while Fauvinard tunes the piano on stage. The comedy lies in the fact that Fauvinard is oblivious to the poodle while the audience is aware of the *images* of both events simultaneously. Finally, one of the most enjoyable aspects of the play was the round house space. The actors at times continued in their dialogue while directly facing and seeming to speak to an audience member. The atmosphere of “being in the thick of the comedy” was especially effective as opposed to watching the comedy from afar.



Images from www.orangetreetheatre.co.uk.

***The Country Girl* by Clifford Odets
Directed by Rufus Norris
Apollo Shaftesbury Theatre
7:00 p.m.**

At the surface of *The Country Girl*, the play deals with motifs of an actor's plight. Frank Elgin auditions for a play directed by Bernie Dodd. Although Frank has a rocky audition where he can barely remember the lines, Bernie hires Frank even in the opposition of his producer. It becomes clear during the audition that Frank struggles to regain respect and his former glory, and the audience is easily able to sympathize with his difficulties. Beyond sympathizing with him as an actor, it perhaps is easier to sympathize with his character, who is a man at the age where he should be at the height of his career with the ability to reflect on his accomplishments in life. Instead, one quickly learns that not only must Frank deal with difficulties in his career, but he also struggles with personal difficulties and problems in his relationship with his wife Georgie. For his performances, Frank uses the device of method acting. In fact, in his opening night performance Frank succeeds in his role by *becoming the character* to such an extent that

he loses himself and injures his costar. He seems to channel all of his actual felt frustration into the moment where he explodes. Aside from the events of the play, it is interesting to think about method acting from the perspective of the audience. As discussed in class, Clifford Odets began in Group Theater where actors improvised and used actual emotion to build their characters from the inside. Odets background likely served as inspiration for the play to develop the character of Frank as an actor. The idea of Frank's inspiration of method acting stands at odds with his need to gain star power. He needs approval as an actor and as a man which is demonstrated by the fan telegrams which both Georgie and Bernie have sent to him. However, perhaps Frank desires only to be a star for the sake of nostalgia rather than to gain spotlight. His success as an actor represents a time when he was self-sufficient (or at least more so than what he has become).

The weightier matters of the play focus on Frank's alcoholism, his attempted suicide, and his dependence on Georgie. While dealing with Frank's deeper issues, Georgie also becomes an actor. She states that she is a country girl who does not understand the complexity of the theater. This persona of a country girl, however, was in another life. In reality, she has become her husband's caretaker who now must fit this role which she has decided to play. Georgie clearly conveys strength, yet her character seems to suggest that this strength is a hard exterior which she has put on. In other words, Georgie must hide inside of this hard shell to protect herself as well as to continue in her trajectory of caring for Frank. The play suggests that perhaps somewhere inside Georgie live wishes and hopes for happiness. After Bernie kisses her, she longs to pursue romance, yet this can only be a dream because she must remain in her duty to Frank.

Frank also masquerades (or acts) in his own life. He convinces Bernie (and for a long time also the audience) that Georgie is really the one who was an alcoholic and who tried to commit suicide. However, it seems that in his denial of his own problems, Frank actually begins to imagine that these problems are Georgie's rather than his own. In order to convince Bernie of this, Frank must method act. He must use real emotion in his stories, and perhaps Frank really takes on this character and believes his own lies. Notably, it does not seem that Frank remains in control of his actions. Rather, like Georgie, his life has become dictated by the circumstances of death and addiction which emphasize the naturalistic tone of the play.

One of the greatest scenes speaking to the genre of naturalism occurs after Frank and Georgie's major fight. For all purposes, Frank has hit rock bottom. He sits on the ground overcome by his addiction, drinking cough syrup, when he is discovered by Bernie. Finally, both Frank and Bernie must face the possibility of life without Georgie. Frank exists in a vulnerable and childlike state. One of the best elements of this production occurred during this scene through the use of the set. After Georgie leaves and the audience can see Frank lying on the ground, the production paints an image of two separate but broken people. The window facing upstage reveals Georgie outside while Frank is in a state of despair on the ground, so both characters are separate yet visible, creating an almost split-screen effect.



Image from www.apollo-theatre.co.uk/current-show.htm

***Cinderella* by Sergei Prokofiev**
Directed and choreographed by Matthew Bourne
Sadler Wells Theatre
7:30 p.m.

If anything, Bourne's reworking of *Cinderella* as a ballet is a testament to the ability of music and movement to tell a story. The play begins with a WWII video of the Blitz projected onto a screen. This initiates the cinematic atmosphere portrayed by the production. As discussed in the program, the screen along with the use of surround sound in the theatre was intended to create the experience of cinema since Bourne was inspired by many classic films such as *Waterloo Bridge*. Like film, the play also succeeds in incorporating a great deal of action onstage. At times there was so much happening on stage that it was difficult to choose only one part of the stage on which to focus. However, this great deal of movement seems characteristic to the nature of the ballet and the many dancers required to depict the story. The dancers' use of space was

critical in invoking the emotions necessary to tell the story. For instance, when the Angel first encounters the tattered Cinderella, he delivers a sense of hope and uplifting of the spirit. Cinderella lies on the stage with the Angel standing above her. Without coming into physical contact with her, the Angel manipulates Cinderella's space to raise her to a standing position. This moment provides a sense that the Angel has some supernatural power in a puppet-master-esque sort of way. Similarly, when Cinderella and the Pilot first meet, they slowly invade each other's space without actually touching. This movement creates a sort of tension and emotional tug-of-war as the dancers play tug-of-war with the space. Another interesting use of space occurs when a line of suitors attempt to court the made-over Cinderella. Rather than each dancer approaching Cinderella, they all create a connected synchronized line which effectively puts all of the suitors on the same level in their courting. Their synchronized line of extension was beautifully fluid. In the larger group numbers, the choreographers used an interesting sense of layering within the space. The clearest example of this was in the scene at the underground station. The set consists of different sized circular entrances layered on top of each other which facilitated the layering of the actors – the soldiers occupied one layer of the tunnels while the prostitutes danced in the front layer.

Dance in this production also had the ability to become symbolic. The ticking cloth on the screen first introduced the motif of passing time, but the dancer carried through this motif at various moments when they coordinated their arms to represent the ticking of the clock. The Angel continued this type of movement to remind Cinderella and the audience that time was running out. The shoe is a reoccurring prop, and the dancers focused on what the shoe represents. Namely, the pair of shoes represents the

chance for Cinderella and her prince to be matched together. In the scene just prior to the their reunion, Cinderella dances with the shoe in a way that depicts pain surrounding the shoe as if the shoe also felt pain from being in a state of separation.

This production showed ways which comedy can be conveyed through dance in comparison and contrast with the traditional farces which we saw. Movement certainly adds another aspect to any comedy, yet the comedy of dance seems to have its own flavor. As in the traditional farces which we saw, timing and pacing both played a key roles in the creation of comedy. In the ballet, timing also created comedy but with a new spin. For example, in one of the synchronized ensemble dances, one of the women dancers purposely gets out step with the others in the choreography. This event is dramatized as the character becomes lost and acts as if she does not understand how to rejoin the group. Her mistaken step and disjointed timing with the others almost seems to mock the convention and structure of dance. A similar moment occurs in the group dance of soldiers. They are all kicking, but once the rest of the group has stopped, a single dancer continues and pretends not to notice that the others have stopped. The other men laugh at him, and this serves to poke fun at themselves (as dancers), which creates a lighthearted moment because we can always appreciate the ability to laugh at ourselves and not take ourselves too seriously. Finally, the dance between Cinderella's father and stepmother highlights this theme of mistaken step and disjointed time. With a dramatic effort, the two attempt to get into place and make a grip. However, instead of taking his wife's hand, the father grabs her arm. The two then toil about to get into the proper hold, but they both attempt to correct the hold at the same time which only worsens the position. Finally after a good deal of fussing, they are able to proceed with the dance.

This example shows how the mistiming manages to poke fun at themselves as dancers, yet it also conveys a larger message of the story that these two characters are out of joint.



***Beauty and the Beast* by Lucy Kirkwood**
Directed by Katie Mitchell
Cottesloe Theatre/ National Theatre
3:00 p.m.

Although this production of *Beauty and the Beast* was appropriate for an audience of children, it had a much different feeling than the well-known adaptation by Disney. In addition to the new characters such as Beauty's sister Lettice who was added by Kirkwood, the production created an environment for the play closer to the original fairy tale. The aesthetics of the play (which was set in the Beast's castle) created a somewhat dark and dangerous atmosphere akin to what one might imagine of a Tim Burton film. The play captured the essence of the original fairy tale as it captured the essence of story telling (in an almost mythical fashion). Namely, since the play was set on such a small stage, a problem arose of how to convey a great deal of motion and passage of time. In one sense, the play solves this with the narration by the Man in Pink. At first the role of the Man in Pink is a bit unclear. In addition to his role as a narrator, he also reveals his

character as a magician and entertainer. It seems though, that his ability to directly address the audience and create comedy gives him a role as a foppish character or fairy inspired by a character such as Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ultimately, the play captures the essence of traditional story telling with the use of the lantern show, where cut-out silhouettes were projected onto the screen. The silhouettes narrated such events as Beauty's exploration of the castle, and this narration created a play in which the audience not only experiences the events happening on stage, but the audience also enters the world of imagination so inherent in story telling. The silhouette images show us only a smattering of what has happened, but we are left to fill in the rest of the images for ourselves. Also, a key feature of this production which captures the original fairy tale is the magic which exists within the framework of the castle. Unlike Disney's production of *Beauty and the Beast*, there exists not just the Beast's creation of magic within the story, but rather, there is some larger magical force at work. The house makes a spread of desserts appear as well as a silent-film of Beauty's mother. When Beauty returns for the second time, the vines on the walls are revealed to have beautiful red roses. As the play progresses, one remains wondering which secret world the castle will reveal next.

This play uniquely created a very corporeal viewing experience. Projected sounds of Beauty's father's gurgling stomach and the Beast's heavy breathing emanated through the theatre. When George emerges from the Beast, a sense of being birthed is created by the drawn out "slurping sounds." These sounds highlighted the bodily experience of living as a human or as a Beast.

One of the most intriguing inventions of the play was the Thought Snatcher, a mad scientist looking cap on the end of a long pole. When placed over the head of its

target, it would reveal the thoughts of that character or audience member and a bulb would light up. The Thought Snatcher was not a hit with the audience because children seemed afraid to participate in the activity, yet the use of the Thought Snatcher within the play presented a unique solution to a classic problem of plays. Namely, that there exists a difficulty of revealing introspective thoughts of a character *while* they occur. Of course, playwrights have the ability to reveal a character's innermost thought through a soliloquy or an aside. The Thought Snatcher, however, adds a new aspect to uncovering a character's thoughts as now the audience has the ability to hear what the character perhaps would not wish to be revealed. For instance, the Thought Snatcher reveals Beauty's stream of consciousness after she fails to return to the Beast and the Thought Snatcher catches her toil over "I broke my promise." We are also made a party to the darker but true thoughts of characters such as Lettice when she plots to keep Beauty home to cause Beauty unhappiness. This thought device also developed some of the comedic moments of the play that would have been otherwise impossible such as when Beauty's father sits at the table as he is about to eat soup. This device also hears the thoughts of his stomach... gurgling.

Finally, a striking feature of this play is its feminist outlook on Beauty. Rather than depicting her as a damsel in distress, the play creates her as strong and independent. Most obviously, Beauty shows little fear of the Beast and offers herself to stay in the castle instead of her Father making some sacrifice. Also, even though Beauty is made to look feminine (she wishes for longer hair, for example), she also wears trousers. The play displays a final feminist spin when Beauty proposes to the Beast. Throughout the

play, the Beast has asked her, “Will you kiss me, will you love me, will you marry me?” Beauty then turns these questions back to George once he emerges as a man.



Image from www.londontheatre.co.uk

***Phantom of the Opera* by Andrew Lloyd Webber/ Charles Hart
Directed by Harold Prince
Her Majesty’s Theatre
2:30 p.m.**

While the *Phantom of the Opera* is a play about the power of music and the relationship between the Phantom and Christine, this production also emphasized how it is a play concerning production within production, perspectives, and exposure. Throughout the play, there is an overwhelming sense of the Phantom and music as one entity. Christine calls him the “Angel of Music.” Even though the music fills Christine’s heart, the ultimate downfall of the Phantom is that he only manages to occupy Christine’s head as her lyrics suggest, “the Angel of music sings songs in my head.” The final disconnect between Christine’s head and heart is emphasized by her heart’s choice of Raoul. Subsequently, she realizes the Phantom’s deception and ability to manipulate her. “He’s deceived me! He’s invaded my mind!”

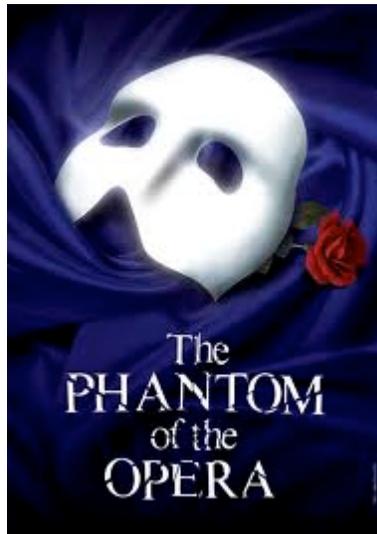
Although the Phantom hides away from the world because of his marred appearance, it is not his appearance which makes him an unsuitable match for Christine. Rather, it seems that the Phantom wishes to expose Christine as he cannot expose himself. As the story progresses, one can see that the Phantom and Raoul have competing goals for the trajectory of Christine's life. Whereas the Phantom hopes to expose Christine's voice to the world by making her the star of the opera (in a way which he almost hopes to live vicariously through her), Raoul seems to care for her in a more personal way. In fact, in direct opposition to the Phantom's hopes, Raoul sings to Christine "let me guide and protect you. Let me *hide* you." In this way, Raoul cares for Christine in a private way while the Phantom cares for her in a more public way. Ultimately, Christine's private feelings align with Raoul.

The other plot which the production emphasizes is the production motif. The play begins with construction of the opera house. The chandelier is covered by a large cloth and the curtains for the backdrop have not yet been raised. In a grand moment, the theatre is constructed (which also mirrors the idea of Christine's construction into a star). A large production of *Hannibal* is put on by the company with the Prima Donna in the lead. After the grandiose production concludes with the Phantom dropping the back curtain, we as the audience also witness the deconstruction of theatre. For instance, the giant elephant statue spins around to be taken off stage, and two members of the tech crew are hidden inside as if they were inside the Trojan Horse. The new owners of the theatre continue to try to put on a successful production. The original owner of the opera house has eagerly retired, and the new owners do not seem to realize what they are getting themselves into. In a song where the new theatre owners have received a letter

from the Phantom ordering them to cast Christine as the next lead, the owners stand their ground and try to assert control. However, the owners really have no control over the fate of the opera house, and their notion that they do is one of the many illusions in the production. All the physical parts of the opera house are under the control of the Phantom. He has control as a producer and director since we see him on the overhead balcony working with support cables, and he also has control as an audience member as he has a reserved box seat.

This production plays with the idea of perspective through the Phantom and through the nature of a production-within-a-production. While the audience has the power to watch Christine's intimate moments, so does the Phantom. For example at the tomb of Christine's father we do not see the Phantom standing by the cross on top of the tomb until he begins to move. We have watched Christine walk to the tomb but so has the Phantom. In this way, he becomes part of the audience. At times the Phantom seems to have a broader view of the theatre than does the audience. His voice was projected from different part of the theatre behind the balcony such that we had the sense as the audience that the Phantom was also watching us, yet at other times the audience has the ability to observe the Phantom like the rest of the characters. When the Phantom takes Christine across the lake, the Phantom's private life and thoughts are made vulnerable to the audience. There are other moments when the audience's perspective shifts as if we were in the production. A clear example of this was after Christine's first star performance. She faces upstage with her back towards us, and the back curtain opens onto a projected pit orchestra and audience. Raoul and the owners are sitting in side box

seats upstage, and it is almost as if we as the audience are receiving the flowers right there along with Christine.



***Midsummer* by David Greig and Gordon McIntyre**
Presented by Traverse Theatre Company
Tricycle Theatre
8:00 p.m.

A modern day comedy, *Midsummer* captures the essence of the ups and downs of life through the characters Bob and Helena. The play is primarily a comedy, yet there is also a great deal of substance within the play as Bob and Helena reflect upon their lives – where they have been and where they are going. *Midsummer* seems an appropriate title for the play in this sense. One way to consider the title is through the traditional sense of “midsummer” as the shortest night of the year where the norms of society are pushed aside and revelry takes its place. Indeed according to society, Bob and Helena are a bad match, and their lives should not intertwine, yet the circumstances of the play allow them to get mixed up with each other when they meet one night. “Midsummer” also seems to emphasize the point in which each character is in life. **“CHANGE IS POSSIBLE”**

flashes across a moving screen, and in fact change is *inevitable*. The larger message of the play seems to suggest that one's state of being is a state of change, but it takes a particular moment (possibly in a person's so to speak, midsummer) for change to be realized. In Bob's case, this moment occurs during his 35th birthday when he breaks into discussions of "The Department of Philosophical Underpinnings." According to Bob, "Egg becomes the chicken – chicken becomes the egg – and so on – endlessly – life is a metamorphosis – life is change. Bob too was once an egg, now he is a fully grown man: two states of being so utterly different from one another that you might think they prove that Bob too is in a constant state of change. Proof, if you like, that 'this is not 'it.'" For Helena, her moment of reflection seems to begin when she is a bridesmaid in her sister's wedding. For women, marriage represents an achievement – circumstances are changing – things are getting better. Helena's sister goes through this rite-of-passage as a woman, but Helena does not. She shows up drunk, and although she believes along with Bob that "marriage is a hopeless waste of time," Helena realizes that she has missed *something* as her nephew describes to her his dream of being an astronaut. Like Bob, Helena is also 35, and her life is moving. She cannot recapture the moments which are gone. Thus, at this midsummer state of life, both Bob and Helena wonder – is this 'it?'

Although society along with Bob and Helena themselves agree that they are a bad match, certain elements of the production painted the characters as if they were appropriate for each other, and what tied them together was the music of the play. In the very first moment of the play, they both grab for their guitar with mirrored actions though they have not yet met at this point. The stage also seemed to paint an image of two disjoint sides of the same coin. The elements of their separate lives filled each half of the

room and met at the center bed. As the audience discovers more about Helena's character through the props on her side of the room, we similarly learn about Bob's life through his objects. The way which the play was narrated also created this atmosphere of compatibility. At times Helena would narrate the events of her own life, and Bob would narrate the events of his own life. At other times when they were together on stage, Helena would begin to narrate Bob's life and visa versa. Not only did this make the story telling of the play more interesting, but the narration also made it seem that they characters could finish each other's sentences. Also, there was a sense that their relationship somehow gave each one the authority to narrate the other's life. In other words, this authority provided Helena the ability to narrate Bob's experiences better than he could himself and visa versa.

Overall, the play explores ideas of different types of relationships that two people can have with each other – from a sexual relationship to a mutual friendship. These two characters experience a wide range of strange occurrences such as finding a tickle-me-elmo in bed with them to getting tied up together in Japanese rope bondage. While many of the moments were hysterical to the audience as well as the characters, quiet moments also represented mile stones in the relationship which we watched unfold. Even during their second night together, the ability to lay and be silent in each other's presences marked an achievement. Ultimately, the play concludes with some uncertainty about the outcome of their relationship. This uncertainty, however, seems to reflect the idea of change. We cannot pin down a specific result because their relationship beyond the play is also in a constant state of change.



Image from www.tricycle.co.uk/current-programme-pages/

***The Master Builder* by Henrik Ibsen**
Directed by Travis Preston
Almeida Theatre
7:30 p.m.

The Master Builder explores the idea of going through life detached from the cycles of nature. Both Solness and Aline are living in a deathlike state. In Aline's case, her sole purpose in life is duty. She lost her true purpose in life when she lost her children. The death of her children through breastfeeding seems to be the event which disrupted Aline's natural cycle. The way in which her children died was a very unnatural and unsettling event. Breastfeeding ought to be a way in which a mother gives life to her children – not how she takes it away. In the case of the Master Builder, he has become disconnected from life through the loss of his imagination and through the loss of his creative energy. For him, imagination and creativity are symbols of his youth, and now that they are lost, he exists in a state of fear of being overthrown by the younger generation which possesses these qualities.

The stage of this production seems to reflect the prison or barren wasteland which the Master Builder's mind and soul have become. The coldness of the stone wall and the

dirt floor convey a sense of death. In order to once again become connected to life, Solness needs the intervention of some supernatural force which will reawaken his creative energy. The character of Hilda enters his life as a, so to speak, “life force.” She reanimates his imagination through his memory of the towering churches which he once had built. Hilda’s arrival could be interpreted in multiple ways. In one view, this actual girl whom he once met serves as this life force. However, at times the play seemed to take on the feeling of *A Beautiful Mind* where reality in the play does not match up with reality in the Master Builder’s mind. In this interpretation, perhaps the play which we see is the Master Builder’s insanity enacted, and Hilda is merely a figment of his mind – a figure who has been summoned from inside himself to help him escape from the prison which he has built.

In either interpretation, Hilda does manage to rekindle the flame of imagination within the Master Builder. He once again has the ability to feel and to create. Hilda and the Master Builder discuss the kingdom which the Master Builder had promised to build (in a literal interpretation, the kingdom which he told Hilda to build – in the second interpretation, perhaps the kingdom which he had once dreamed of building and promised to himself). Hilda speaks of a castle where she is the princess. These ideas represent the imaginative ideas of children and the creative energies of youth of which the Master Builder is so afraid. In addition to her powers of imagination, Hilda also represents some innate connection with nature which the Master Builder has lost. This connection was physically conveyed through Hilda’s bare feet and traveling cloak which made her appear almost spritelike. This aspect of Hilda’s character was also conveyed through her love of flowers and sunlight. In fact, she tries to wake Aline from her state

by telling her to sit in the sunlight. Hilde also tries to discover something within the Master Builder by encouraging him to confront his fears, specifically his fear of heights. He climbs to the top of the tower to hang a garland, but he ends up falling to his death. Even though he has died, this action is something he never would have done prior to Hilda's arrival, and it represents a sort of rebirth. Thus it seems that in Master Builder Solness's moment of death, he is most alive.



Images from www.almeida.co.uk/