

## **Theatre in London 2011-2012 Journal: A Journey through the Mind**

### **An Introductory Note:**

I realized about halfway through my writing this journal that many of my entries dealt with an emerging interest: the mind and cognition as it is represented in literary arts. So, I deliberately focused the second half of my journal on such themes. Nearly all of the entries discuss some aspect of cognition, sometimes including ways in which we, as the audience, might make sense of the spectacle occurring onstage. My topics range widely across such subjects as vision & perception, belief vs. doubt, judgment, expectation, motive, consciousness, subjectivity & identity formation, imagination & narration, language, reading, & interpretation; memory, empathy, madness, obsession, folly, and dreams. I've found it very useful to approach many of these plays from a subjective point of view, keeping in mind that they all portray characters who each see the world from their own unique perspective. In many of the plays, I see multiple, competing realities, rather than any single objective truth. In the spirit of maintaining this subjective perspective, I've devoted a few lines in each entry to non-theatre experiences and personal reflections. Because these two-and-a-half weeks in London have turned into so much more than a college course, I briefly record a few of my fondest memories, in the hopes that I can look back on this journal years later and relive the incredible experiences I've had here.

**Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* (1990)**  
**Director Peter McKintosh**  
**Harold Pinter Theater**

Thursday, December 29, 2011

My flight arrived at Heathrow in the late morning today. Jet-lagged as I was, I hustled to get through airport security, grab a bite, and hop on the tube. I arrived, panting, at our hotel just in time to leave for our matinee at the Harold Pinter Theater. What a whirlwind first day!

Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* can be defined as a trial. On the most literal level, it is a hearing in which two characters try to convince a third character of their guilt or innocence, so that his judgment will work in their favor. But it is also a trial in another sense, as a test of character, of moral fiber. And because we become emotionally attached to these characters, these

two definitions of trial become inseparable. For us, the question of truth becomes inextricable from who is good or bad, who we *want* to believe. But it is unclear which of the characters deserves the audience's sympathy. The only facts we know are that Paulina and her husband, Gerardo, have a loving but troubled relationship because of Paulina's history of imprisonment and torture at the hands of the previous Chilean regime. She recalls that a certain, particularly cruel doctor (ironically named Dr. Miranda), not only ordered her torture and raped her, but blithely played Schubert's four movement piece for a string quartet, entitled "Death and the Maiden" during her sessions. Her association of Schubert with this terrifying portion of her life has made Paulina hate a piece of music that she once loved. Since then, she has exhibited signs of mental illness. Further complicating the situation is the fact that Gerardo has just been promoted to head an investigation into the crimes of this very regime.

Paulina's unstable mental health makes both her truth claims and ethics suspect. Dr. Miranda's character, in many ways the most inscrutable, is pitted against Paulina's word. Gerardo, then, is the viewer's surrogate in the play, a relatively uninformed, objective, and well-intentioned character who is torn between the competing realities of his beloved wife and the good Samaritan (Dr. Miranda) who came to his rescue. We audience members initially find ourselves inhabiting Gerardo's shoes as we try to parse out whose story is most believable. At first, Gerardo seems like a reasonable character, but as the story progresses, we find some disturbing patterns to his behavior.

For one, he is hardly the passive listener, allowing evidence or reasoning to sway his opinion. Rather, he has a vested interest in both Paulina's and Dr. Miranda's confessions – a budding career that depends on the discoveries he can make into the crimes of the previous regime. At times, his supposed performance to eke a confession out of Dr. Miranda at Paulina's behest seems almost too earnest, even passionately misogynistic. One is unsure at times whether Gerardo's misogyny is performance or truth. When Dr. Miranda first arrives, Gerardo remarks on women's hysteria and even voices his concern to Paulina about her "relapses" which threaten to compromise his career. The play opens with his brazen-faced lie that he needs her approval before taking the prestigious position offered by the president. One could argue that Gerardo's motives are not totally humanitarian; he seems as deeply concerned with his own reputation than gaining justice for his wife's suffering. While the audience focuses specifically on whether

Paulina's or Miranda's story is the truth, we tend to lose sight of Gerardo – who grows increasingly silent.

In the end, though, it is Gerardo who wins the most satisfactory results. His wife's actions – whether or not she killed Dr. Miranda is left ambiguous – have done nothing to undermine his budding career; rather, they seem to have brought about unprecedented cooperation in his investigations. He receives the credit for apprehending the war criminals *and* for having on his arm such a beautiful wife. Meanwhile, it is unclear whether Paulina or Dr. Miranda received their due justice. Was this Dr. Miranda truly the same doctor who supervised Paulina's torture? Or was Paulina taking out her (understandable) need for vengeance on an innocent man? Were Gerardo's decisions based on what he believed was objective truth or what he judged most expedient to building his career? All of these questions are left at least partially unresolved. Judgment is largely withheld. In this sense, the entire production seems like a reconstructed story or a set of events given to us, the audience, to judge. In this sense, the play was a trial in which we, as the audience, are asked to be judge and jury to the actions of the characters. The ending challenges us to ask if we, put in Paulina's or Gerardo's places, would or could have acted any differently. And, if not, it poses the question of whether we have any right to pass judgment on our fellow human beings. It was quite a thought-provoking and sobering start to our two weeks of theatre.

**Nick Stafford's *War Horse* (2008)**  
**Adapted from the novel by Michael Morpurgo**  
**Directors Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris**  
**New London Theatre**

Friday, December 30

I spent the morning with a small group of students exploring the nearby Camden Markets. There were all sorts of neat shops and booths selling food. We explored vintage clothing stores, bookstores, and game stores. A highlight for me was discovering a tiny music shop in which I met a very welcoming employee, who played the piano and greeted me in French accent. After buying a few pieces of very affordable sheet music, I got coffee with a few other students in a quaint little café. Kieran found a food stand that sold exotic meats and he ended up trying a kangaroo burger!

I was eager to head off to our matinee for the day; I had heard so much praise for *War Horse* that I was giddy about finally being able to see it. Our seats at the New London Theatre were in the first few rows, front and center. We were so close that we could've reached out and touched the actors or the magnificent puppets on stage. At one point, during the fight between Joey and Tophorn, the equine puppets were literally rearing over our heads! It was amazing to be able to see the puppeteers working at such close quarters. The skill and simultaneity with which three people must work to operate a single puppet is a marvel to behold.

The play version of Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse* makes an interesting contrast to the film version, which I recently saw. I responded much better to the play than I did to the movie because the play's fantastical nature gave the impression of telling the story from a more convincing perspective, that of a child – either Albert's or Joey's – that conveyed an innocence and openness to wonder that was much more convincing than the film's attempt at objective realism. In the play, we audience members could see the world through Albie's winning naiveté or Joey's simple, animal perspective. The puppets, for example, gave a dimension of imagination to the play that was utterly lacking in the film. One can imagine, for instance, that a horse might view himself and his peers as symbiotic creatures who are only completed through their relationship with their human masters. I felt that the use of skeletal frames for these puppets was telling, because one could always clearly see the three men working the puppet, one at the head, heart, and hind (as they're labeled in the official programme). This gave a very real sense of how deeply Joey and the other horses were shaped by their interaction with human beings. It also allowed audience members to see how profoundly synchronized the puppeteers were in the mechanics of working the enormous puppets. From the complexities of the ears to the tail and hooves, working the animals required a remarkable amount of skill, coordination, and choreography. This use of puppets made an early scene in which Albie marvels at the newly-arrived Joey that much more believable for me, because I myself was struck speechless at this strange new presence that was brought to such convincing life. Rationally, I knew that this was merely three men inside a wicker contraption, but knowing that it was supposed to be a horse (and not just any horse, but the protagonist of the play) somehow rendered it so much more than the sum of its parts. The decision to use such props as these puppets and the background screen through which flashed impressionistic drawings of lush fields or war-torn landscapes (as if taken

from a soldier's journal) encouraged the audience to suspend our disbelief, and see the world through our protagonists' unique perspective. This added a layer of wonder to the story that using live animals (in the film) lacked.

Another big difference for me was the play's use of music. While the Spielberg movie was given a traditional John Williams score full of lush orchestration and weepy violins, Stafford chose to punctuate the play's action almost exclusively with English folksongs. These were sung live – usually by a single male balladeer, who was occasionally joined by a chorus. One can easily imagine Albie growing up with such songs constantly in his ears – hearing rustic melodies played by shepherds in the fields, celebrating harvest festivals with singing and dancing, falling asleep to his mother's lullabies. And we are thus invited to share in the same cultural background that informs Albie's life. Late in the play, the cheerful lyrics and tunes of the folksongs were often played during scenes of carnage and despair from the war. The contrast between the simple joy of the songs and the senseless tragedy of war evoked a sense of nostalgia which lent those scenes a certain emotional edge that increased their poignancy. Other sound effects, too, worked better in the play than in the film. To me, the gunshots in the play were genuinely shocking. I nearly jumped out of my seat several times, as – I imagine – an untrained horse might react. In contrast, there were almost no elements of the film that surprised, much less shocked, me. The equine noises made by the puppeteers, too, were phenomenally realistic. From the snorts and heavy breathing to squeals and high-pitched neighs, the actors sounded remarkably like a single horse.

Perhaps the biggest and most crucial difference between the play and film was that Spielberg's decision to portray the story's events realistically greatly reduced a key element – the requirement on the audience to suspend their disbelief. For me, the film's weakness was in its predictability and overdone sentimentality. The play, I think, is almost equally bathetic. But because the film relied so heavily on naturalistic portrayals, the excessive sentimentality and happy ending felt jarringly at odds with the carnage apparent on the battlefield. In the play, the more impressionistic elements like the puppets, the stage props, and the live singing, made it easier to believe that the narrative was told from the perspective of an imaginative boy. The romantic tone of the story felt like a fantasy to me, and it paradoxically felt more fantastical on stage than it did on screen.

Afterwards, we followed Dr. Peck on a trek through central London to our second theater. Dr. Peck walks incredibly quickly, and it was a sporadically rainy evening, so many of us kept track of our group only by keeping sight of our classmates' colorful umbrellas. On the way, we walked through the lobby of the Opera House, a place I wish I'd returned to. A large group of us then sat down for a quick dinner at a falafel restaurant before heading over to the Young Vic early to catch a very interesting backstage tour.

**William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601)**  
**Director Ian Rickson**  
**Young Vic Theatre**

*Hamlet* set in a mental hospital. Hamlet and Ophelia as patients. Claudius and Polonius as doctors. A self-mutilating Gertrude. A female Horatio. An unraveling Ophelia popping pills, rather than handing out flowers. "Dead" characters reappearing or springing back to life. These were but a few of the elements of Ian Rickson's visionary production of *Hamlet* that surprised me. Some still continue to puzzle me, but after a bit of reflection, I've come to appreciate the ambition of this production. From my classmates' reactions and the few reviews I've read, this is quite a controversial play. Critics are divided over Rickson's overtly Freudian reading and I saw the same schism reflected in my peers' discussion. My friend Sara disliked it for the exact opposite reason than the critics did; she believes Rickson did not go far enough in adapting it to its new environment while the critics lament that the insane asylum metaphor heavy-handedly robs the play of its ambiguity. One reviewer went so far as to call the production a "reductive view of the play, which strips out both poetry and politics in order to make its point."<sup>1</sup> Politics, I can concede. But poetry? That is simply ridiculous, and an insult to Michael Sheen, who gave an absolutely riveting performance. While Sheen – with his corkscrew curls, scruffy beard, and suspenders – certainly didn't look like a Hamlet to me, he played the Danish prince with such unwavering intensity that I couldn't tear my eyes away.<sup>2</sup> He was by turns restless, flinty, gleefully melodramatic, acerbically witty, and genuinely vulnerable. Most critics, at least,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-news/8881752/Michael-Sheens-controversial-Hamlet-merely-proves-the-plays-innate-worth.html>

<sup>2</sup> My one regret is that we didn't get to see Sheen's facial expressions during the "Alas, poor Yorick" speech, because he had his back to us. We did, however, get a good long look at the iconic skull!

recognized Sheen's brilliance, some even noting that he has the potential to be among Hamlet's great interpreters. And while I appreciate ambiguity as much as the next person (see my thoughts on *Death and the Maiden*), I disagree with the critics. I admire Rickson for taking such a fresh perspective on a play that has seen countless adaptations and, unlike Sara, I thought he was quite bold in executing his novel concept all the way to the end. What I found most compelling was the way his production invited us to see the action from Hamlet's perspective.

The most obvious effect of setting the play in an asylum was to confirm Hamlet's mental instability. The supernatural elements, most notably the Ghost, were staged in such a way as to suggest the events as they persist in Hamlet's mind. Through the creepy backstage tour (which was designed to appear as if we were passing through the haunted corridors of a claustrophobia-inducing mental institution), director Ian Rickson indicated early on that we, as the audience, would have privileged access to Hamlet's mind. Indeed, in the opening scene, we witness Hamlet donning his late father's mantle, suggesting how deeply Hamlet's identity is already entwined with his father's. By putting on Hamlet Senior's effects, our protagonist seems to enter into his consciousness as well (or, at least, he imagines himself doing so). This was most brilliantly enacted in the Ghost scenes. Early in the play, we see the Ghost through Horatio's eyes. It appears in a black coat, heavily hooded so that its face was entirely obscured. The lights flicker out and leave both the actors and the audience members suspended in utter darkness for several seconds, so one can only hear the characters' frantic voices. When the scene grew visible, we saw that the Ghost's costume was inhabited by Hamlet himself, while Hamlet's traditional role was filled in by Horatio. (Several playgoers and I speculated that Horatio might be a figment of Hamlet's addled imagination, but could not declare this a certainty because there are several scenes where Horatio interacts with other characters, often without Hamlet's onstage presence.) Of course, this might be a realistic nod – drawing a resemblance between late father and live son, but if we accept that Hamlet really was the Ghost (in other words, he imagined both the Ghost and his response to it), the implications are stunning. It means that Hamlet willed his way into believing Claudius' treachery, regardless of whether or not his uncle was actually guilty of fratricide. It also points to a possibly schizophrenic condition in Hamlet. This potential schizophrenia is elaborated in a later scene when Hamlet hears his father's voice while he excoriates his mother, Gertrude. The Ghost does not visibly appear, but when Hamlet talks and

gestures to it, he faces the window which partitions the orderlies' quarters from the patients'. While the light on the orderlies' side is usually on, it is conspicuously off for this scene. This allows the glass of the darkened window to serve as a reflecting surface. Thus, when Hamlet speaks to his father's Ghost, the image we see is that of Hamlet raving at his equally agitated reflection. When it is clear that Gertrude cannot hear this conversation, Hamlet begins to suspect his own sanity – as we have from the beginning.

The shocking second act featured not only the deaths and resurrections of key characters like Polonius and Ophelia, but also of Hamlet himself. Polonius, who dies violently by Hamlet's own hand, literally rises from the ground to reappear as a bloodied priest who officiates Ophelia's funeral. Hamlet is the only character who marks the physical resemblance between Polonius and this priest. None of the other characters seem to notice that one of their company has a gaping wound in his side. Ophelia, whose death can also be attributed more indirectly to Hamlet's actions, rises from the grave to play two roles – first, as the messenger who informs Hamlet of Laertes' challenge and, secondly, as the servant in charge of foils during the final duel. Again, only Hamlet seems to notice. The effect of these unexpected resurrections is to emphasize Hamlet's guilty conscience. Despite his reluctance to renounce his plan to kill Claudius, he feels responsible for the deaths of innocents. It also suggests his instability, since the other characters who interact with these characters (the priest and the foil-bearer) act normally – implying that these two characters are not, in actuality, the risen dead. Rather, Hamlet projects his guilt over their deaths onto others.

That Hamlet himself dies in the end, but reappears as the unmasked Fortinbras (in a costume that eerily resembles the Ghost's) cinches the fact that the narrative takes place mostly in Hamlet's head. I do not claim that it is completely his mad dream, but that as the story progresses, especially in the second half, it becomes increasingly staged in his mind as well as in the "reality" we witness. Or, perhaps, our consciousness begins to merge with Hamlet's, so that the deeper he spirals into his madness, the more we see the world through his warped view. Does this happen because we, on some level, see some appeal in Hamlet's anguished state of mind? Do we desire his perspective or, at least, find ourselves able to empathize with his plight? There is something magnetic about the force of Hamlet's charisma, which is as brilliant in its flamboyant histrionics as in its devastatingly self-destructive deterioration. Although there are tantalizing



hints scattered throughout the production that we're not seeing things quite as they are, we don't (or I didn't) fully realize how utterly we'd been immersed into Hamlet's mind until the final act – when the dead and buried Ophelia suddenly emerges from her sandy grave. But that moment of epiphany was searing in its force and clarity. Suddenly, everything made sense. And this gradual, incremental, and confusing descent suggests the very nature of madness itself: one does not realize how compromised his mind is until, suddenly, others can't see what he can. Thus, Rickson's playing with perspectives allows us a glimpse into what Hamlet saw and felt, demonstrating what it feels like to go mad.

So how can we make sense of the final scene? Even if we accept that this coup is occurring mostly in Hamlet's mind, how can he be doubly present as both a corpse and the conqueror, Fortinbras? On one level, it points back to his schizophrenia, suggesting that Hamlet has overcome one version of himself, the one who feels anxiety over killing Claudius. The Hamlet who experienced guilt or remorse for committing murder is gone. Perhaps he needed the revenge to give closure to that tumultuous chapter of his life. Perhaps the arrival of Fortinbras indicates Hamlet's entry into a new (more decisive? less haunted?) consciousness. It seems one Hamlet must die for another (the resurrected father? his liberated subconscious? the "real" Hamlet?) to emerge and take control. And if we've been seeing the action through Hamlet's eyes, where are we? (dead with Hamlet? rife with new potential, like Fortinbras? an outsider, like Horatio, left to make sense of the fragmented story?) All of my questions here indicate that Rickson's critics are, to some extent, wrong. The play has *not* been stripped of its ambiguity; while Hamlet is definitely mad (in the sense that we designate those with multiple personalities "mad"), the ending does not fully clarify what has happened in Hamlet's mind. We are still left in a state of uncertainty which, one could argue, makes us as mad as Hamlet. Such elements made this play one of the most compelling productions of *Hamlet* that I've ever seen.

**Conor McPherson's *Dublin Carol* (2000)**  
**Director Abbey Wright**  
**Trafalgar Studios 2**

Saturday, December 31

I spent the morning visiting the Sherlock Holmes house with a fellow student, Becca. She is certainly better read than I am in the tales of Doyle's famous detective; my most recent encounter

with Holmes has come in the form of BBC's brilliant new miniseries, *Sherlock* (which incidentally aired its second season during our stay in London). Thus, I had in mind Sherlock's spacious suite from the show. But the flat at 221b Baker Street is actually very cramped. We were forced to queue up outside the house for nearly a half-hour because the staircase is so narrow that only a few people can traverse them at any given time. When we did get inside, we were greeted by employees in Victorian costume, dressed as either policemen or maids. I was charmed by a number of items: a framed collection of pipes, an elaborate brass microscope, a weathered violin, Dr. Watson's diary, a lovely cameo of Irene Adler, a dodgy-looking dwarf of a manikin manservant. My favorite rooms were the two in which life-sized wax figures were placed in tableaux reflecting famous scenes from Sherlock's stories. One room included the enormous taxidermied head of the Hound of the Baskervilles, mounted on the wall like a hunting trophy. Another room was devoted to deceased victims, all of whom had been killed in grisly ways. I remember seeing limbs hanging from the ceiling and cellar full of rotting corpses. The most frightening figure – one that very much unsettled me, was a man seated ramrod-straight in a chair who stared fixedly at the entrance (and thus at us when we walked in) with a vacant gaze. Upon closer inspection, I found a very narrow ribbon encircling his head; it turned out to be a venomous snake (head erect, hood flared, fiercely hissing) from “The Speckled Band” who had killed the man in his seat! Before we left, we both had our picture taken with the policeman at the door, who provided us playful props – the trademark deerstalker and pipe.

Trafalgar Studios, where we saw our matinee of *Dublin Carol*, is unique among the theaters I've seen so far in having such a small 10 x 16 foot stage. There were only three or four rows of seats framing three sides of the stage. Viewers in the front row were practically onstage with the actors. This was appropriate given how intimately we came to know our three protagonists – John, the alcoholic undertaker; Mark, his assistant who is experiencing trouble with his girlfriend; and Mary, John's daughter, who returns to summon John to the bedside of his dying wife. Given the names of our three protagonists, we might read Christian allegory into the play. I propose that the play inverts key aspects of the Gospels. For example, Biblical scholarship accepts the Gospel of Mark as the text that was composed the earliest among the Gospels of the Four Evangelists, while the Gospel of John is the last of the four. Yet in the play, it is John who is the older man and who tries to take on a fatherly role to the younger Mark (although it

should be noted that it is Mark's uncle Noel who "saved" John, by offering him a much-needed job as assistant undertaker.) Similarly, where the Gospel of Mark tends to focus on Christ's life as a man, rather than any of his explicitly divine aspects (indeed, in his only clear mention of Christ's death, Mark calls him the "Son of Man" rather than the Son of God), the Gospel of John concentrates on the concept of Christ as Logos, the Word, and thus as a divine being. But McPherson presents John as a man scarred by his life experiences and obsessively considering and reconsidering them in his mind, while Mark seems trapped by words – both John's and his own. Although he seems reluctant to sit down and share a drink with his employer, he cannot leave while John keeps talking, even when his words digress into random tangents. And Mark slowly becomes entangled in John's conversation when they touch on the subject of his love life. Despite himself, he finds himself seeking John's advice about what to say to his girlfriend to restore their relationship. (And it is through this plot point that we get our first hints of John's adultery with Carol, which estranged him from his wife.) Although he tries to present himself as an aloof young man, only seeking out John's company to pick up his paycheck, we eventually see how he hungers for John's words and perhaps a figure that he can imitate as he embarks on his young life. The parallels between John and the younger Mark grow increasingly apparent: both have ended up (reluctantly) working in the undertaking industry, a joyless and often thankless job. Both have experienced or are currently experiencing trouble in their romantic relationships, from which they need some sort of saving. John, too, seems to recognize something of himself in Mark, and it seems that one of his motives for discoursing at such length to Mark is to try to prevent him from making the same mistakes that John himself made in his youth. At one point, he urges Mark to "get out among the living," exhorting his assistant to enjoy his life experiences, despite his own failure at doing just that. Rather, John consorts mostly with the dead (literally, the corpses of his job), is himself spiritually stagnant, and almost seems to desire self-obliteration through his destructive drinking.

We begin to see some of John's mistakes when his daughter, Mary, unexpectedly arrives. Her name, of course, evokes the Virgin Mary. But she seems the opposite of what one might expect in a Madonna figure. Rather than being blessed with an Immaculate Conception, she is clearly not a virgin and is in fact married to a husband of whom John disapproves. And instead of birthing the divine Savior in mortal flesh, she comes bearing not a child but news of death.

Her coming is not met with celebration or gifts, but hostility and the remembrance of painful days gone by. We learn that John's alcoholism soured his relationship with his children early in their lives. His estrangement from his children forced Mary to develop somewhat masochistic tendencies; she painfully recalls how because her father was widely known as an "eejit," she fostered a persona at school as an "eejit in my own right" so that she could create a fiction of being close to her father. When John begins to deflect blame to others, Mary angrily calls him to account, forcing him to examine how his bad choices over the years has torn apart their family. Her wrath is instrumental in helping John make his final decision – to try to reconcile with his family by going to the hospital to sit at his wife's deathbed. John's newfound compassion for the women in his life is doubly significant, given that John was the disciple charged by Christ to care for Mary – here figured in both the daughter and the wife.

John's major problem has been his refusal to believe in anything but the material world. We see him clinging to drink as well as showing hints of his former fleshly lust. When he learns that Mark's girlfriend is a flight attendant, he jokes about his attraction to women in uniform. But we also see traces of John's nobler nature: as an undertaker, he makes a point of trying to comfort his customers in their hour of bereavement. He explicitly calls the funeral rites he performs a favor that is done for the living, rather than the dead. And we also see a charitable aspect of John in his constant desire to take care of Mark, most notably by feeding or brewing tea for him. In both of these compassionate characteristics, John is Christ-like. In the end, we see John beginning to believe in the possibility of his own redemption. He restores his beloved Advent calendar to the wall and opens one of its windows with a vestige of childish delight. And his final act in the play is to put back the Christmas decorations he took down, namely the tinsel star. This represents the guiding light of the Nativity and, it is implied, has helped lead John to his own kind of (re)birth. It is significant, then, that the entire play takes place in the course of one day (following Aristotle's unities): Christmas Eve. *Dublin Carol* ultimately works well as a Christmas play since it ends with the potential for John to be reborn into faith.

After the play, we stayed in the theater for a few extra minutes to pose for Dr. Peck's photos. We got a very nice one with the whole group just outside Trafalgar Studios. Then, I explored the nearby Chinatown and got dinner there before heading to the Gielgud Theater on the West End for our evening showing of the hilarious *Ladykillers*.

**Graham Linehan's *The Ladykillers* (2011)**  
**Adapted from the play by William Rose**  
**Director Sean Foley**  
**Gielgud Theatre**

Much of *The Ladykillers'* phenomenal humor was, I think, due to the heavily stereotypical characters. Recognizable stereotypes like the prim and proper British lady, the psychotic mastermind, the gangster, the mentally slow black man set up certain expectations in our heads and seemed to lessen their force as three-dimensional characters and somewhat reduce them almost into caricatures of realistic characters. But I do not mean in any way to degrade the play; rather, I think the effect that these reductive, cartoon-like characters have on the audience is to simultaneously distance the characters emotionally from the audience and make the entirety of the play more funny. For instance, because Mrs. Wilberforce's ignorance of her tenants' criminal activities is evidenced in her incessant insistence on serving them tea, we recognize her as a British stereotype and cannot help but be somewhat amused by her patronizing generosity, because her tenants' true criminality is so obvious to us. The humor of Mrs. Wilberforce's character is in the wide gap we see between her actions and a more "realistic" one. Thus, we laugh *at* her apparent, willful blindness, as well as *with* her, since society requires us to accept her good (albeit senile) intentions.

This emotional distance that the play creates between the characters and the audience works slightly differently with the villains. Partially because the play does not give us any indication (at least until relatively late in the production) of the villains' motives, we assume that they are planning the bank robbery purely for the money. This, combined with the characters' stereotypical attributes, primes us to handle their subsequent deaths not with shock, despair, or gravitas, but with a knowing nod (unrepentant criminals, after all, get their just desserts) or even laughter. Some of their deaths are riotously funny precisely because they are so absurdly overdetermined. Professor Marcus, for instance, is undone both by the hubris in his own intellect *and* a twist of fate. Just when he thinks he's succeeded in escaping from Mrs. Wilberforce with the money, he realizes that the cash-packed cello case is too big to fit through the window, his chosen escape route. Later, in the subway, his ludicrously long scarf gets stuck in the railroad tracks. Following the recent default, he immediately mistakes this event with the numerous times when Mrs. Wilberforce has stepped on his scarf, but in reality it is an oncoming train which has

trapped him and, ironically, kills him. This suggests a karmic universe with a wry sense of humor. And this humor works to negate, or at least decrease, any trauma we might feel about Professor Marcus's demise. The play's humor is based on predictability and the mixed sympathy and mockery of the stereotypical characters.

The set, too, added a sense of infantilization. The Gielgud Theater staged *The Ladykillers* in Mrs. Wilberforce's dollhouse of a home, set adjacent to King's Cross station. We were treated to two views of the house – an interior and exterior. Because of the cut-away angle at which Mrs. Wilberforce's house is opened to the audience, one can see both the upstairs and the downstairs portions simultaneously, giving us an omniscient point of view that the characters lack. Because we were able to see every room simultaneously, we could witness the action of Mrs. Wilberforce in the kitchen and parlor on the ground floor as well as the nefarious plotting happening unbeknownst to her in the upstairs bedroom. The exterior view was enhanced by a hilarious car chase scene in the first act, done with toy vehicles! We saw a toy train running up and down the building as well as our villains' vehicle pursued by a toy police car, complete with blaring sirens and lights. The chase, like the journey of the toy train, occurred vertically – up and down the exterior of King's Cross station – and ended in a car crash at the foot of the building. Using toy cars lightened the tone and allowed us to view the play's action as a game, in which only the audience can see all the moving pieces.

Afterwards, I spent New Year's Eve with a group of students. From the West End, we made our way down towards the Thames, fighting through dense crowds of revelers. I remember searching in vain for an available restroom; apparently, there is not an available lavatory in the whole of central London during the few hours before the New Year. We ended up in St. James' Park in front of Horse Guards. From there, we could spy the top of the beautifully-lit London Eye. Unlike the Times Square countdown in the States, there was nothing of the sort in London. The only way we knew midnight had arrived was when a spectacular explosion of light illuminated the night sky above the London Eye, and we were treated to a dazzling, half hour display of fireworks. Then, we followed a mass exodus out and made our way home on foot. The only way that we could keep track of each other in the thick throngs was to link arms. Our way home was marked with linked arms and much drunken singing. What an unforgettable New Year!

**Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* (1923)**  
**Director Howard Davies**  
**Lyttleton Theatre**

Sunday, January 1, 2012

I dragged myself out of bed this morning to meet Dr. Peck and number of students on our trek to Westminster Abbey for New Year’s Day Mass. I am not Christian and had not been to a Mass in many years, so it was a remarkable experience. For me, much of the thrill was simply in stepping upon the same stones that my literary hero Chaucer had trodden over 500 years ago! I was overwhelmed by the majesty of the abbey, its soaring towers, its stained glass windows illuminated by morning light, its weighty sense of history. Our pews, in the section reserved for the Queen’s Scholars, were right next to the church organ and the choir’s pews, so we were right in the thick of the music. And, for me, this was the most moving part of the service. Although I am by no means a religious person, I can see the appeal of church-going. The hymns pulsed with a subdued but palpable passion, often underscored by long passages of melismatic brilliance. The four-part sections in the choir often sang simple melodies in repeated rounds which became mesmerizing in their rhythm. The singers layered and wove their voices together so seamlessly and intricately that I could not help but stand in awe at what beauty the human voice can create. Afterwards, a few of us stayed in the Westminster area to see the New Year’s Day parade before walking over Waterloo Bridge to our first show at the Lyttleton in the National Theater.

I would like to reflect briefly on the significance of *Juno and the Paycock*’s title to the play’s narrative. The Classical story that the title refers to (in its earliest rendition) is a fragmentary poem entitled *Aigimios* by Hesiod. In it, the queen of the heavens Hera assigns her favorite guard – the hundred-eyed Argus (sometimes “Argus Panoptes”) – to guard the nymph Io against Zeus’s (Hera’s husband) lust. But Zeus eventually defeats Argus by enlisting the wily Hermes, who disguises himself as a shepherd, sings all one hundred of Argus’s eyes to sleep, and then slays him by stoning. Later, Hera honors her faithful guardsman by having his eyes emblazoned on the tail of her avatar, the peacock. (Meanwhile, Io is raped by Zeus and bears him two children, both of whom either become or give birth to founders of their own cities.)

“Juno” is, of course, the Roman name for Hera and the peacock is mentioned several times in the play, always to refer to Juno’s pretentious husband, Jack Boyle. While the character Juno shows some parallels with the Classical goddess, I would like to focus on the idea of Argus

and his many eyes. While there is no single obvious analogue<sup>3</sup> for Argus in the Irish play, the theme of sight runs throughout. Juno, the eagle-eyed head of the Boyle household, sees through her husband's lies and excuses. She sees him as he is (or at least as we, the audience, perceive him) – a lazy and selfish shirker of duty. She badgers him constantly to find employment so that he can support the family, and even punishes him (by withholding food) when he protests. She also easily sees Joxer as the worthless enabler of Jack's vices. But when it comes to her beloved children, her sight seems less acute. While Juno can perceive her daughter Mary's vanity (the blue vs. green ribbon nonsense), she fails to recognize the flaws in Mary's suitor, Bentham. Out of love for her crippled son, Johnny, she refuses to "see" or give enough attention to his problem of seeing ghosts. She even, on occasion, defends her husband from her children's criticisms – determined to keep peace in the household (sometimes) at the expense of truth. In all of these cases of oversight, one could argue that Juno is not incapable of seeing problems, but is willfully blind: she would rather turn a blind eye than face these complex problems and their implications. In Bentham's case, one could claim that she approves of him because he appears to radiate the education, wealth, and prestige of a higher social class. He also, of course, brings the Boyle family the unprecedented good news of their inherited windfall. In Johnny's case, her pity for him (because of his amputated arm) keeps her from doing anything about his frightening visions other than dismissing them as nightmares. Her well-intentioned heart and desire to believe in the goodness of humanity cause her to purposefully (if not consciously) blind herself to these problems. The results are disastrous, reminiscent of a Greek tragedy.

Other characters, too, have problems with perception. The entire family is taken in by Bentham's wealth and wants badly to believe that he will bring them their fortune, their ticket out of poverty. The only point at which they do seem slightly suspicious of Bentham is when he explains the intricacies of Eastern religions. But even then, they seem more impressed with his knowledge of such exotic topics than by his deliberate flaunting of his learning. Almost all of the main characters have their moments of vanity or pretention: Jack flaunts his new wealth, Juno

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Joxer might fill the role of an Argus figure, but only nominally. He sees everything, but he does not serve a master (other than himself) with any loyalty and is certainly not a guardian. Rather, Joxer abuses the advantages he gains from his all-seeing position. Instead of acting like the loyal Argus, he behaves like another many-appendaged Classical figure, Rumor – using his keen powers of observation to air rumors about the Boyle family, all for his own selfish purposes.



makes a show of her anti-republican sentiments, Johnny reiterates the patriotism that cost him his limbs, Mary is vain about her appearance, and both Joxer and Mrs. Maisie become sycophants to the wealthy Boyles. Thus, all of these characters could – to varying degrees – be called “paycocks.” A major theme of the play, then, is how people choose not to see things for convenience’s sake.

But the misfortunes that befall the Boyle family do have the advantage of forcing Juno to see more clearly. In light of her murdered son, she reads her earlier condemnation of the killed Republican boy as a sin which brings on retaliatory punishment in Johnny’s violent death at the hands of the IRA. More importantly, she now sees the common humanity between Johnny and the other unfortunate boy, rather than their political differences. This new revelation also leads her to perceive Mary’s unlucky situation anew. Unlike the men, she sees Mary’s pregnancy by Bentham as an accident which deserves sympathy rather than censure. And, in the end, she makes the difficult (but justified) decision to give up on her irredeemable husband in favor of helping Mary salvage what’s left of her reputation and bring new life into the world. The ending, then, helps Juno live up to her namesake – as the goddess of childbirth.

**Jez Butterworth’s *Jerusalem* (2008)**  
**Director Ian Rickson**  
**Apollo Shaftesbury Theatre**

Monday, January 2

Jon, Laurel, and I spent the day exploring museums in Trafalgar Square after lunching on the most succulent falafel I’ve ever had. We picked it up at a tiny shop called Gaby’s near Leicester Square station, an eatery I’d highly recommend if it’s still open. (A sign on the door indicated it would soon be closing.) We spent the afternoon at the Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery. By far the two greatest highlights for me were seeing the bust of a young Tennyson, since we usually only see his iconic bearded bust (which sits in the mezzanine of our very own Robbins Library); and viewing the life-sized sculpture of Albert and Victoria in Anglo-Saxon dress. It was also a treat to see photos of contemporary actresses (including Thandie Newton, whom we’d seen in *Death and the Maiden*) and comedians (including Monty Python and my favorite, Stephen Fry). The photo of the month was a black-and-white shot of a pensive Colin Firth,

who'd just won an Oscar for his portrayal of George VI in the *King's Speech*. At the National Gallery, my favorites included the Impressionists and the Rubens collection, which I viewed last. I also enjoyed seeing the unfinished Manchester Michelangelo, which affords his audience a rare glimpse into Michelangelo's creative process. Afterwards, we had an opulent dinner at the Café in the Crypt (on Dr. Peck's recommendation), the restaurant in the basement level of St. Martin's in the Fields. It was very crowded because many patrons were getting dinner before the feature concert (I think it was a Dvorak), and we ended up chatting with a British couple who shared our table. Then, we headed to an evening show which quickly – and rightly – became a favorite.

In *Jerusalem*, the character of Johnny "Rooster" Byron combines two mythic themes, the land and manhood, in his role as the father figure to almost all other characters in the play. He lives outside a fictional town in Wiltshire in the greenwood, and demonstrates a profound connection to the land. Rooster can tap into the collective consciousness of England, as nobody else can. He is able to recite old tales reminiscent of Celtic folklore, reviving the forgotten history of the island. His tall tale of the giant who built Stonehenge reminds me of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Merlin, who moves a circle of stones from Ireland to England to commemorate Arthur's fallen men in the Battle of Badon. Through such stories, Rooster allows his listeners to feel a connection, to feel bigger than their individual selves, a part of a living culture. Rooster's connection to the land also seems deeper than mere history; he is profoundly connected to nature itself. He mentions his love of the trees, and even seems to have power over the land. Rooster is a true son of England, having intimate knowledge (in the form of folktales) of both its human history and of the island itself, as a manifestation of Nature. It is significant, then, that nobody knows Rooster's exact age. He seems to have been around forever and rumors circulate about his miraculous survivals, even resurrections, from daredevil stunts that would have killed any ordinary man. His mystique and the tall tales surrounding him (which he does nothing to dispel) lend Rooster a legendary quality, as if he is as ancient, powerful, and native to England as a Druid. And he inhabits a forest that, in his presence, seems as fey as he is. In one scene, Rooster narrates all that he has witnessed in these woods, combining the mythic and marvelous with the mundane:

I've seen a lot of strange things in this wood. I seen a plague of frogs. Of bees. Of bats. I seen a rainbow hit the earth and set fire to the ground. I seen the air go still and all sound stop and a golden stag clear this clearing. Fourteen-point antlers of solid gold. I heard an oak tree cry. I've heard a beech sing hymns. I seen a man they buried in the churchyard Friday sitting under a

beech eating an apple on Saturday morning. When the light goes, and I stare out into the trees, there's always pairs of eyes out there in the dark, watching. Foxes. Badgers. Ghosts. I seen lots of ghosts. I seen women burn love letters. Men dig holes in the dead of night. I seen a young girl walk down here in the cold dawn, take all her clothes off, wrap her arms round a broad beech tree and give birth to a baby boy. I seen first kisses. Last kisses. I seen all the world pass by and go. Laughing. Crying. Talking to themselves. Kicking the bracken. Elves and fairies. (Butterworth 102)

The sheer number and variety of experiences listed here suggests great longevity. Even Troy Whitworth, an avowed enemy of Rooster, comments that “nothing changes out here.” Though he makes this remark rather deprecatingly, one could argue in quite the opposite way. Rooster’s woods (and even Rooster himself) seem suspended in time. Unlike the rapidly changing society of the New Estate, the greenwood operates as a kind of unchanging Edenic space – always verdant and welcoming. Rooster himself, though recognizably past his prime, continues to live like a youth, partaking in and even hosting wild Dionysian parties.

The people of the New Estate like Troy Whitworth would characterize Rooster’s behavior as juvenile, irresponsible, and lawless – unmanly, perhaps. But Rooster is arguably the most masculine figure in the play. He lives by his own code, refusing to allow the rules of society to constrain his choices or lifestyle. He can see goodness and individuality in adolescents whom society has cast off as useless. Under his wing, the unemployed Ginger finds a home, the wayward Lee begins his quest to find his true spirit name, Davy awakens from the deadening routine of his abattoir job, and Phaedra finds a haven from her sexually abusive stepfather. For Rooster, then, true manhood is a simultaneous independence from the morally suspect institutions of society, but also a profound involvement with its people. It is the nurturing of youth, helping them transition into adulthood in ways that the norms of society may not necessarily allow or condone. This type of motherly manhood is exemplified in the mythic Englishmen archetypes whom Rooster evokes. He is simultaneously a Robin Hood figure – an outlaw considered a pest to society but who provides for his merry men in the greenwood – and a King Arthur figure – who holds court and nurtures his budding knights. More obvious than either the Robin Hood or King Arthur parallels is Rooster’s affinities with another figure of folklore – Saint George – the patron saint of England. (The play, after all, begins on St. George’s Day.) Most famous for defeating a dragon that threatened the kingdom, Saint George is an appropriate comparison for Rooster, who is similarly concerned with protecting his English home against the forces of evil. And, as we’ve seen, Rooster is not just protective of the physical space of his

home, but also of its people. It is significant that our first sight of the play – the stage curtain emblazoned with a vivid red cross – is the symbol of Saint George himself (or Spencer’s Redcrosse Knight). Also significant, I think, is the fact that the first character we see, Phaedra, steps out in front of this iconic symbol (rather than having the curtain lifted to reveal her). That she – the lost child most in need of protection – is silhouetted against the enormous red cross emphasizes the way in which Rooster hovers protectively over all. Of course, Saint George is an allusive figure, his red cross symbolic of Christ himself. Rooster most fully embodies Him after he is beaten up by the Wiltshire bullies – Troy Whitworth and his thugs – for daring to suggest that Troy not only committed the sin of physically abusing his step-daughter, Phaedra, but also did it out of a frustrated sexual desire for her. The beating takes place offstage, but when Rooster returns, he bears bloody X’s on both cheeks. Here, the Christ analogy becomes apparent because Rooster is not only marked with the red cross on his face, but suffers their infliction for the sake of protecting others.

This is not the only scene in which blood is important. Immediately afterwards, Rooster receives a visit from his young son, Marky, who has gotten lost on his way to the fair. Instead of trying to conceal his injuries from the boy, Rooster makes a point of showing his blood to his son. Wiping his face, he smears blood across his hand and spins a tale about it, recounting how he used to be a daredevil and attempt stunts like using his motorcycle to jump over thirteen double-decker buses. He recalls one instance in which he had an accident and nearly died:

When I got to the hospital they found something out. I’ve got rare blood. Rarest there is. Romany blood. All Byrons got it. I’ve got it and you’ve got it too. Listen to me, now. This blood, it’s valuable. To doctors. Hospitals. Every six weeks, I go up Swindon General, and I give ‘em a pint of my blood. And they give me six hundred pound. They need it, see, and I’m the only one they know’s got it. (Butterworth 107)

One could read Rooster’s confession as a prophecy of his impending death, a father’s final gift to his son and an appeal to him to carry on the family line (hence his urgent insistence to Marky to “remember the blood”). But more importantly, the very concept of rare blood that is needed by other people suggests a noble lineage. It harkens back to olden times in which kings were believed to be descended from gods; this explains Rooster’s rumored resurrection from the jaws of death. And this is not the only special part of Rooster’s anatomy. In an earlier humorous

section where Rooster narrates his fantastical conception (he was born from a bullet that punctured his mother's womb), he asserts that the bodies of "Byron boys" have special powers:

And when he dies, he lies in the ground like a lump of granite. He don't rot. There's Byron boys buried all over this land, lying in the ground as fresh as they day they was planted... With the teeth sharp. Fingernails sharp. And the two black eyes, staring out, sharp as spears. You get close and stare into those black eyes, watch out. Written there is old words that will shake you. Shake you down. (Butterworth 49)

His claims of corpses immune to decomposition fits with what we've already heard of Rooster's longevity. But it is in his eyes that are written words of such power that they will "shake you." We do not what to make of such a statement until much later in the play, when his ex-wife Dawn, pays him a visit. (How perfect is it that "Rooster" is married to a "Dawn"?) When she expresses concern for his safety, Rooster asks her to look into his eyes, at which point he "show[s] [her] something" (Butterworth 71). We have no way to access whatever it is that Dawn sees, but her reaction is telling: she begins to shake – just as Rooster stated earlier. I speculate that whatever is written in Rooster's eyes, it is intertwined with his special blood and seeming inability to be killed. It stems from his profound connection to England, one so deep that Rooster seems infused with the ancient history and power of the very land itself.

And as the latest in a line of seemingly immortal, immaculately conceived guardians, Rooster appropriately tries to protect the May Queen, Phaedra. That she is repeatedly called the May Queen is significant; she represents the innocence of youth, one who is budding into sexual maturity but still in need of protective parenting figures. Her demands that he dance with her – a move that could be interpreted as emerging sexual desire – quickly morph into a need for protection, as Rooster instinctively understands when he lifts her up in his arms and shields her against his chest. His dance with her also suggests his role as a kingly figure who courts the feminine spirit of Spring, heralding the end of winter, the promise of rebirth, and the union of man and nature. The ending, in which Rooster frantically beats the giant's drum, and calls upon the ancient heroes of Britain to defend him and his home from the invading bulldozers, nicely brings together all of these disparate elements – Rooster's deep sense of Englishness, his tie to nature, his mythic connections, and his innate drive to act as a protective father figure for what he sees as his own. As the final drumbeat and his visceral howls fade away, we sense the leaves of the trees trembling, which could either result from the roar of oncoming bulldozers or, we

hope, a giant's enormous footstep, rocking the land in response to Rooster's call.<sup>4</sup> The lights fade out and the play ends there, leaving the audience with a wondrous sense that magic could indeed return to England, even in this jaded age.

This appropriately brings us back to the beginning, to the play's title. An allusion to William Blake's eponymous poem, *Jerusalem* begins with the fairy figure of Phaedra singing its opening stanzas. While the song was unfamiliar to me, I imagine that every Londoner in the audience would have instantly recognized it, given its history. Blake's poem was apparently adapted by the British Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges, and Sir Hubert Parry into an anthem meant to inspire demoralized British troops in WWI. It proved so popular that it was later adopted by the Anglican Church as a hymn, and is still frequently sung in public schools. Its doubled status as both a secular anthem (often called the unofficial anthem of England) and a hymn makes *Jerusalem* as distinctly and holistically English as can be, and – notably – as Rooster is. Thus, it is worth looking at the lyrics:

And did those feet in ancient time,  
Walk upon England's mountains green;  
And was the holy Lamb of God,  
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;  
Bring me my Arrows of desire;  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:

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<sup>4</sup> I cannot neglect saying a few words about Mark Rylance's deeply affecting performance as Rooster. He embodied the brash, tall tale-telling, anti-establishment wastrel to perfection, but also invested his character with a surprising level of vulnerability and human dignity. Although Rooster does not resemble any kind of traditional hero, he was utterly convincing; one cannot help but root for him in his crusade against the insidious New Estate. Rylance somehow manages to balance the larger-than-life attributes of the mythic figures I cite here with Rooster's very apparent human foibles. I (and everyone else I've talked to) was moved to tears by the final scene, where Rylance pours out his very soul in one of the most raw, heartbreaking performances I've ever seen. It sounds clichéd, but my heart was in my throat during the entire final sequence, and I got chills when I heard the rumbling response to Rooster's impassioned cries. When the lights went out, the audience (rightly) erupted into applause, commending Rylance for an incredibly moving performance.

Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green and pleasant Land.

At the beginning of the show, Phaedra – in her sweet soprano – sings the first two stanzas directly to us before she is interrupted by the thundering rave music of a raging party, hosted by Rooster. The hymn itself narrates the coming of Jesus to England, which He has selected as the site of the New Jerusalem – the seat of the kingdom of Heaven. Blake displays a sense of wonder that Christ would choose this land, with its “dark Satanic mills” in which to build the celestial capital. In the play, the New Estate is the most obvious representation of these “dark Satanic mills,” because it spreads infectiously, without any regard for human life or Nature, and worships only money. Even though Phaedra is interrupted before she can finish the song, the audience (presumably) knows the remainder by heart and has it in mind as the play begins.

By the end of the play, when Rooster has been abandoned by – or deliberately driven away – everyone who loves him in the face of mortal danger, he curses those “dark Satanic mills” (what an appropriate description for bulldozers!) who would come to destroy him. I read his sending away of all his disciples as, again, a protective act; he prevents their risking their lives for him. For him, the battle is as much a “mental fight” as a physical one. He must steel himself to face his enemies alone, as is the prerogative and the curse of such a consummate guardian. Thus, one can easily imagine Rooster intoning the last two stanzas of the hymn like some shining archangel warrior – calling for his weapons to fight for and build the New Jerusalem, to resurrect the spirit of England’s glorious past and restore his home.

**Neil LaBute’s *Reasons to be Pretty* (2008)**  
**Director Michael Attenborough**  
**Almeida Theatre**

Tuesday, January 3

Even though there was a free lunchtime concert playing at St. Martins in the Field, I opted to stay in a take a long nap because I was coming down with a cold. I now regret that I didn’t get a chance to see a free concert. I wasn’t able to snag a ticket for *Animals and Children Took to the Streets*, so I only had one play today and was able to get some much-needed sleep. Jay, Katie, Kieran, and I arrived in the Islington area early to have dinner. We sat down at a very good

Indian restaurant, but had to rush in order to make it to our show. We ran to the Almeida theater just in time, though we had to stash our takeaway boxes in our various bags and purses.

To me, Neil LaBute's *Reasons to be Pretty* is less about beauty than issues of language and expression. I don't think that the major problem in Greg and Steph's relationship is that he does not find her physically attractive or that she is not conventionally beautiful, but that both are unable to express exactly what they mean to each other. In the opening scene, Steph's rage at a perceived insult launches her into a spate of obscenity. Her rage so overrides her reason that she cannot express herself verbally by any other means than by cursing at Greg. What she seems to want is an admission of guilt and an apology, neither of which Greg gives her willingly. On a deeper level, she wants him to understand how deeply his remark has hurt her. However, the enormity of her anger prevents her from articulating herself in a comprehensible way; unable to elicit a full confession or an apology, she deflects her intent into sheer hostility. In fact, the only way she seems able to fully express her frustration is non-verbally – by killing Greg's goldfish. (Later, she is able to express herself somewhat more rationally, when she prepares a written list of Greg's purported physical flaws. But even here, her message seems less about showing how deeply he's wounded her than bringing him down to her level.) Her emotions undercut the effectiveness of her language, reducing it into cursing. Greg is right when he accuses her of irrationality.

Yet simultaneously, Greg does not present himself as a ready recipient for her message. He hems and haws and waffles around the issue, trying to deny that what he said was meant in a hurtful way. Although he eventually admits that he thinks her face is just "regular" in an implicit comparison with a sexy new worker's, Crystal's, he quickly defends himself by claiming that he did not mean it as an insult. Later scenes support Greg's claim; he does not seem to hold physical beauty as the ultimate basis for a romantic relationship, nor does he always speak with complete sincerity. He certainly values the truth of words more highly than his best friend, Kent, does; but he seems more eager to avoid conflict with the volatile Kent than to willingly wear his heart on his sleeve. While the two-faced Kent openly lies to his fiancée and then laughs about it with Greg, Greg at least attempts not to say anything blatantly false. Of all the characters in the play, Greg is most apparently concerned with the expressive power of language; during his night shift, he reads Swift, Hawthorne, and Irving and during confrontation seems to be the one most able to



keep his cool. But even he is unable to say the one thing that Steph most needs to hear – that she is beautiful to him. Perhaps this is because he does not put such great store in beauty; to him, what is more important is that he loves her, regardless of how she looks. Yet, he seems unable to put these two crucial ideas into words, or at least, into words that Steph understands and accepts.

This seems to suggest not only a failing in both lovers' ability to communicate their true intent, but also perhaps a failure in language itself. Arguably the most satisfying moment of the play for the audience is not embodied in any character's speech; rather, we experience the biggest moment of relief when Greg silences his voice and allows his body to do the talking. When he finally brawls with Kent on the baseball field, we experience a gleeful sense of satisfaction that Kent finally gets what he deserves. Even when Greg reforms for his earlier lie about Kent's loyalty and sends Carly home to ostensibly find Greg in bed with Crystal, we don't receive quite the same sense of satisfaction (probably because we miss out on the spectacle of Kent getting his comeuppance). Sometimes, then, actions can speak where words cannot.

A number of us stayed late to meet the actors at the stage door. A few of us *Dr. Who* fans were thrilled to meet Billie Piper, who played the tenth doctor's companion, Rose. I still cannot believe that I got to shake her hand and have her autograph immortalized in my program. Back at the hotel, our group convened in my room to enjoy a much belated dinner of cold Indian food. It was very satisfying meal to end a long day.

**William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1604)**  
**Director Roxana Silbert**  
**Swan Theatre**

Wednesday, January 4

Upon our arrival in Stratford, Dr. Peck took us to Shakespeare's birthplace, where we were the lucky recipients of an audio-tour in which we learned a bit about Shakespeare's life, works, and enormous influence on literature. The house with its picturesque primrose gardens became a productive place for us to take photos. Afterwards, a large group of us had lunch in at Garrick, a local pub. Then, Laurel, Deb, Dong, and I rushed to the Holy Trinity Church which houses Shakespeare's tomb. After paying our respects to the late Bard, we wandered along the Avon – admiring and taking pictures of the trademark swans – before arriving at the Swan Theater for the first play of our triple-header. Admittedly, I had a bit of a freak-out moment when I saw the

Royal Shakespeare Theater; it dawned upon me that we were seeing the renowned RSC in its birthplace of Stratford, and I stood frozen in awe for a moment.

One of the most striking features of the RSC's production of *Measure for Measure* was the way that our protagonist, Duke Vincentio, made frequent allusions to himself as a magician figure. During his moments alone onstage, he performed sleight-of-hand tricks, manipulating objects like balls and coins into vanishing and reappearing right before our eyes. What was most charming about this was not that the Duke broke the fourth wall (indeed, that did not seem to be the point), but that such tricks provided amusement and amazement for himself. He took such great delight in his own tricks – not just these solitary sleights-of-hand, but also his ability to slip in and out of various disguises and deceive people with his clever wordplay. This childlike delight in himself and hyper self-consciousness made this Vincentio one of the most theatrical I've ever seen. It also rendered him a particularly gifted master of disguise. Here, I'd like to discuss a few of the multiple roles that Vincentio so fluidly shifted between and played.

First and foremost, Vincentio is the duke of Vienna, a political leader and head of the law. Yet, his effectiveness at enforcing law and order on his people is suspect, to say the least, at the beginning of the play. Indeed, his behavior – leaving his dukedom in the hands of a dubious deputy to traipse around the country as a disguised friar – hardly seems fitting for a ruler. Vincentio has allowed the hierarchy of his city to crumble and be overturned, as “the baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart / Goes all decorum.” (1.3.30-31). This recalls early passages in which Vincentio discusses the ineffectiveness of the law and his reluctance to enforce it:

I do fear, too dreadful:  
 Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,  
 'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them  
 For what I bid them do: for we bid this be done,  
 When evil deeds have their permissive pass  
 And not the punishment. Therefore indeed, my father,  
 I have on Angelo imposed the office;  
 Who may, in the ambush of my name, strike home,  
 And yet my nature never in the fight  
 To do in slander. (1.3.34-43)

Vincentio admits here that it was he was faulty as a leader to give his people excessive free rein, to let the enforcement of the law become so lax. Yet, he fears too much for his reputation to take responsibility for executing his own laws; he fears the “slander” of having his name associated with “tyranny.” His solution, then, is to pass the responsibility onto his regent, Angelo, who has

the moral backbone to enforce the laws and take the blame for tyranny. When proper order is restored, Vincentio implies, he will return to reassume the mantle of dukedom.

Vincentio's unwillingness to perform his duties for fear of his reputation characterizes him as somewhat childlike, rather than the just father he should be to his people. His aversion to responsibility, need to be liked, and trickster qualities all seem to liken the duke to a mischievous child. Indeed, in his subversion of his own authority (by putting Angelo in charge and donning the habit of a friar), Vincentio seems more invested in a Bakhtinian spirit of the carnivalesque, inverting traditional hierarchies of order. He is full of contradictions – a duke who resigns his power, a father figure who acts like a child, a friar who masterminds the bed trick. And all of these contradictory identities are reconciled in his recurring role as the magician-trickster, a persona whose very trade is in forgery, slipping between identities, as an entity which inhabits an in-between transitional space and questions the very notion of essence.

The disguise of the Friar is thus a perfect one for Vincentio, because it allows him access everywhere – nuns' cloisters, a duke's palace, the prison and brothel alike. The persona of the Friar also allows Vincentio to carry out his stated mission, as a spy<sup>5</sup> on his own people:

Supply me with the habit and instruct me  
 How I may formally in person bear me  
 Like a true friar. More reasons for this action  
 At our more leisure shall I render you;  
 Only, this one: Lord Angelo is precise;  
 Stands at a guard with envy; scarce confesses  
 That his blood flows, or that his appetite  
 Is more to bread than stone: hence shall we see,  
 If power change purpose, what our seemers be. (1.3.45-54)

His assumptions here do not strike one as particularly charitable or Christian, as would befit a friar, but rather cynical. He remains skeptical of Angelo's supposed chastity and calls his entire court "our seemers," recognizing its possible pretensions. Again, he plays on a seeming paradox – assuming a false identity for the purposes of the revealing the true character of his trusted deputy. In doing so, Vincentio assumes the role of a creator, even God himself, rather than that

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<sup>5</sup> Vincentio's espionage seemed strangely appropriate to me – for a purely idiosyncratic reason. Raymond Coulthard, who played the Duke, reminds me of Matthew Macfadyen, whose defining role (for me) was as Tom Quinn, head spy of the British Security Service MI-5 in the BBC drama, *Spooks*. I kept seeing a modern spy in fifteenth-century garb. At points, I expected Vincentio to pull some modern piece of tech wizardry out of robes – which, in retrospect, seems appropriate, given the Duke's obsession with magic tricks.

of a humble friar. The tricks and substitutions he creates double as tests of character, disclosing the truth through deception. For example, the bed trick he conjures up for Isabella proves not only her sexual purity, but reveals Angelo's lusty appetites and hypocrisy. His crafty substitution of the condemned Claudio's head with a no-name pirate's also exposes Angelo's ruthlessness but, more importantly, demonstrates Vincentio's growing capacity for mercy. (Not only does he refuse to follow the letter of the law by allowing Claudio to be executed, but he even spares the would-be replacement Barnardine when the latter claims he's too inebriated to die.)

Vincentio's development as an increasingly compassionate and merciful character, a duke who will rule according to the spirit – rather than the letter – of the law, comes to fruition in the final scene, when Isabella – in her charity – begs for Angelo's life. Moved by her passion, Vincentio allows Angelo to live, although he stipulates that Angelo must marry Mariana, his jilted ex-wife. Thus, Vincentio seems to have it both ways. He earns Isabella's love by allowing Angelo his life, but justly punishes him by enforcing his marriage to a woman he wronged. The play thus ends with an illustration of Matthew 7:1-2, the Scriptural source from which Shakespeare's play borrows its title: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with that judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure you meet, it shall be measured unto you again."

**David Farr's *The Heart of Robin Hood* (2011)**  
**Director Gisli Orn Gardarsson**  
**Royal Shakespeare Theatre**

After *Measure for Measure*, we bee-lined for the other side of the building where the Royal Shakespeare Theatre is located to see *The Heart of Robin Hood*, a revisionist take on the Robin Hood legend, staged by an Icelandic acrobatics company, and designed with a children's audience in mind. Given our class discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics*, I would venture to claim that this play – perhaps of all the plays we saw – most effectively used spectacle to enhance its narrative. In *Peter and the Wolf* style, animals were played by musicians with their instruments. Runaway carriage horses were played by blaring trumpeters, Plug the dog a shaggy-haired clarinetist, a cranky duck a tutu-clad flautist, and – memorably – a wild boar as a cellist. The stage was used in very versatile ways to convey alternately the magical space of the English

greenwood, the more confined interior of Marian's castle, or the royal gardens. The branches of a massive oak function as the ceiling of this set. From these tree limbs, Robin and his men often swung down on vines or ropes. In a more grisly interpretation, the trees functioned as scaffolds for the victims that Robin hung. (One spectacular scene included Robin stripping a greedy friar of his gold by suspending him on a rope and spinning him so that a multitude of coins sprayed out of his rotating body. Another scene showed Much deep in sleep, suspended upside down in the air – which must've required a phenomenal amount of strength from the actor.) The suspended tree branches were also the source of some spectacular lighting. At times, darkness fell and the lights flickered dramatically to create the effect of lightning. And in the moving scene in which the desperate orphans discover the spirit of the forest, they are lifted up from the snow-covered land into the treetops as soft fairy-like lights shine down, evoking the beneficent stars smiling down upon them. The actors could also plunge into a small pond or use it as a landing site for various thrown objects. The wall and thrust stage were covered with turf to look like a steep hillside. The actors climbed, slid, clung, or rolled down this hillside to give a greater dynamic range to their movements. It could also open to lower a horizontal platform, which often indicated a building – like Marian's castle or a church. This characterization was so consistent that whenever the platform was lowered, I found myself automatically reimagining the scene as a castle scene; I imagined the platform as Marian's balcony overlooking the gardens or as a balustrade from which Prince John announced his cruel decrees to the kingdom.

Another innovative use of this stage occurred during one of my favorite scenes in which Robin and his merry men impersonate a priest at a local church where Marian comes to shrive herself before her forced marriage to Prince John. Rather than try to create a space that resembled a church, the designers ingeniously used the ever-present hillside in a simple way to create the scene. They slid open four panels in the hillside through which the actors stuck various body parts to evoke the extremities of an enormous human body – one at the top for a head, two at either side for hands, and one at the bottom for feet. Not only did this create the outline of a gigantic priest on the hillside, but also cleverly evoked the shape of a cross. The sheer size of this figure (it must have required four separate actors to lie underneath the hillside) lent humor to the scene; it suggested the Church's inflated sense of its own importance, a pomposity which was played up by Robin's put-on, artificially deep voice.

But another effect of this inventive staging was to suggest Robin's profound tie with nature. Embedded into the hillside, Robin becomes the land itself. Throughout the entire play, Robin's name has been associated with the forest, the untamed dangerous space beyond the confines of civilization and human law. Unlike courtly, sanitized versions of Robin Hood, James McArdle played him as a true outlaw, one without an innate sense of morality or mercy, almost a feral animal. (Indeed, during the intermission, McArdle sat in the treetops and when we waved to him, he did not smile or wave back; rather, he stayed in character and snarled fiercely at us.) This Robin Hood has no scruples about killing clerics and feels no obligation to give his winnings to the poor. At the start of the play, his name is already synonymous with all the destructive aspects of the wilderness. But as he begins to interact with the plucky Marian, disguised as androgynous do-gooder Martin of Sherwood, he begins to soften. He follows Martin's lead in caring for the orphaned siblings, then develops his own feelings of affection for them. As he begins to take on the protective role of a father figure, we see him discover more nurturing aspects of his nature. His emerging feelings of fondness demonstrate that his feral nature, like Nature itself, has a flip side – one that is as nurturing as it is destructive. I think this paternal aspect of his character is literalized in the church scene, where he is called "father" (albeit in a religious sense) by Marian. Although the scene primarily parodies the clergy, it seems also to have serious semi-spiritual elements. Inscribed into the land with only his face showing, Robin resembles the Green Man of medieval folklore – a vegetative deity associated with fertility, spring, and rebirth. And this is indeed a significant moment in Robin's character development because it is one of the few instances in which he goes out of his way to seek out Marian, partially to figure out his own feelings for her. This breaks his cardinal rule of "no women" and his more general lifestyle driven by self-interest. It is also significant that this is the only scene in which we see Robin "dressed" in iconic Lincoln green, the green of the grass. In all other scenes, Robin wears brownish earth tones in his fur tunic, leather pants, and boots. Only Martin dons the green doublet and hose that modern audiences associate with Robin Hood; thus, by sporting green in this scene, Robin inadvertently echoes Martin/Marian's motherly nature. It is only in developing both these violent and nurturing aspects of his nature that Robin makes an appealing love interest for Marian, in contrast to Prince John's sadistic lust.

Many of the reviews I've read call *The Heart of Robin Hood* the RSC's Christmas show. I can see how this is an apt Christmas play, since it depicts the rebirth of the title character from a self-interested gangster-ish brigand into a man capable of love and charity. It is appropriate that the play ends with winter giving way to spring, the defeat of Prince John, and the marriage of Robin and Marian. The final display of acrobatics in which Robin and Marian (in a virginal white dress) unite in a lyrical aerial twirl, suspended by two flower-strewn vines, and entwine themselves in each other's arms is one of the play's most breathtaking moments. It is a perfect melding of Aristotelian plot and spectacle and a moving ending to a highly entertaining play.

I wish we'd had time to stay to applaud the cast of *Robin Hood*, but given our tight timetable, we were forced to leave just as the applause began and sprint to the other end of the building for our third and last play of the day, *Written on the Heart*. After the delightful spectacles of our first two plays, this one seemed darkly somber in contrast.

**David Edgar's *Written on the Heart* (2011)**  
**Director Gregory Doran**  
**Swan Theatre**

One of the difficulties that I had with seeing *Written on the Heart* was following its rapid shifts between time periods. The play spans some 75 years and three generations of clerics – represented by the fiery William Tyndale (whose staunch convictions see him through exile and execution), an unnamed Young Priest who is converted to Tyndale's viewpoints, and a wavering Bishop Lancelot Andrewes. I was hard-pressed to tell one character apart from the other, partially because their costuming was so similar. For a while, I even mistook the Young Priest for young Lancelot Andrewes, believing that it was Andrewes who visited Tyndale's cell. Later, my experience reading the script was quite different, and certainly helped me clarify what I'd seen onstage. But I wonder if author David Edgar intended to have this effect, to at least slightly baffle his audience by deliberately having so many characters and scenes echo each other in dizzying succession, creating something of an onstage Babel. There are certain points in the play, especially when the various clerics are debating the merits of single words, slipping fluently between Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, quoting the chapters and verses of Scripture from memory, that they seem no more than talking heads. I would like to think that my initial confusion was a

response that Edgar had designed to help manifest a central theme in his play: that all acts of reading – of meaning-making, parsing symbols, interpreting – are fraught with difficulty, especially given personal differences, factional age, and “office” commitments. By rendering his play somewhat opaque, Edgar forces us to mediate between what we perceive with our eyes and ears and what we understand in our minds, to convert the sights and sounds into logical meaning; in a play about translation, he forces us to become translators ourselves.

In the second scene, our ears are confronted with a literal Tower of Babel, a secluded cell in which three men speaking three different languages are forced to try to understand each other. A young Catholic priest, who speaks Latin, has come to Flanders to interrogate a prisoner, William Tyndale, a fugitive Englishman who has been branded a heretic for daring to translate the Bible into the vernacular. Both the priest and Tyndale can understand Latin and English, but the keeper, who guards the prison cell, speaks only his native Flemish. Ironically, it is the prisoner Tyndale who becomes the translator between the priest and the keeper, creating an inversion of power which he will later exploit. Early in the scene, the young priest recounts a rumor about Tyndale which has been widely circulated:

**Young Priest:** It is said in Louvain, you once supped in company with a famous conjurer, but that on your order all of his enchantments failed.

**Tyndale:** It was not at my order, but in my presence. If his tricks succeeded elsewhere, I know not.

**Young Priest:** One imagines, if they did not, he would lack employment / as a conjurer –

**Tyndale:** Whereas the conjuration I have been ever keen to halt is masses. Kneeling and kissing holy relics. Incense, candlewax and holy water, or as we say, ‘Pope’s piss’. Babbling and braying. Miracles and mumblings of penances and purgatory. By priests who cannot tell the Ten Commandments or who gave us the Lord’s Prayer, but whose only study is fee-gathering and licking arses.

What is at issue here is the subjective nature of truth. When the priest first narrates the rumored event, we are unsure whether or not it ever happened, partially because it sounds unrealistic. But when Tyndale confirms that it did, he introduces a new twist by claiming that the hearsay version of it is untrue, and proceeds to give his version of what really happened. Both versions, as the priest suggests, seem questionable. We scoff at the idea of a conjurer, because we see his magic as nothing but “tricks,” but we are perhaps even more skeptical of prophets who denounce magicians with the same kind of mystic authority that magicians claim. In other words, both conjurers and those that foil them claim access to some higher power that we common folk



cannot understand. In order to thwart a conjurer, doesn't one have to be a conjurer himself? The priest's comment, too, implies that he finds this hearsay of Tyndale's mystical powers doubtful at best. And yet, even though Tyndale claims that he wants to stop the "conjunction" of the Catholic Church – their veneer of ritual and ceremony that distracts from the truth of God's Word – he seems like a conjurer himself. For an audience who presumably is fluent in neither Latin nor Flemish, Tyndale's ability to not only understand what sounds like gibberish to us, but to recast it into either another form of gibberish or comprehensible English, is both astounding and disconcerting. It's astounding to watch because Tyndale's ability to absorb and translate is nearly instantaneous, a multilingual facility that most of us can only dream of achieving. But it is also disconcerting because we have no way of knowing whether Tyndale, in his rapid code-switching, is actually representing the others' words accurately. How are we to know if he is truly saying to the guard what the priest says to him? Would it not be to his advantage to cause misunderstanding between his two captors? (And if he is capable of deceit, how do we know that he is not deceiving us? Is his zealous conviction sincere?)

Indeed, Tyndale does eventually use the guard's monolingualism against him. Using his profound knowledge of Scripture and convincing rhetoric, Tyndale converts the priest to his cause, and then enlists him in tricking the keeper so that they can smuggle out his latest translations of the New Testament. It is a very clever scene of deceit. Before the keeper's eyes, Tyndale and the priest act as if they are on task, looking at Tyndale's writings, miming a reading, but in fact they are planning how to dupe the guard and smuggle out the papers – and they can do this only because they speak in English, a language the guard has no knowledge of. In an interesting move, the priest urges Tyndale to keep talking so he can unobtrusively blow out the candle. When Tyndale asks what he should say, the priest answers "Oh anything. Isaiah." And Tyndale proceeds to quote his rough translation of Isaiah 53:3: "One that had suffered sorrow and had experience of infirmity: and we were as one that had hid his face from him. Truly he took on our diseases and bore our sorrows." The irony is that while this Scripture is supposed to be the Word of God, a prophecy of the coming Christ, and above all a revelation of truth, it is used to deceive. While the candle is extinguished and Tyndale recites this passage, the priest steals Tyndale's papers. During this scene, the keeper is literally and metaphorically "in the dark." But, there is an interesting moment earlier in the scene when the keeper, who is not

supposed to leave his prisoner alone with any visitor, does so willingly for a coin from the priest. The implication is that he senses their subterfuge, but willingly turns a blind eye. Thus, he prefigures the non-believers in this Isaiah passage, those who “hid as it were our faces from him.” He knows something of the truth, but deliberately feigns ignorance. It seems, then, that those who gladly witness a magician’s conjurings are as implicated in the “trick” as the conjurer himself. Language itself may be just such a kind of conjuring.

As translators, both Tyndale and Andrewes struggle with these notions of conjuring and try to strip away what they deem the unnecessarily convoluted Latinate language of previous translations to make their text as comprehensible as possible. As Tyndale says, he wants his translation to be “a glass wherein we see God’s face.” I rather like Tyndale’s word choice in “glass”; it evokes multiple meanings. One could interpret the term as a mirror, in which man’s fallen language reflects the spark of divinity within himself. The use of “glass” evokes ideas of glasses or spectacles, suggesting that the language of the text literally shapes our vision of the Divine, bending the light of our understanding in a certain direction or, in the case of bad translations, refracting or deflecting our perception away from the truth. The word “glass” also implies a sense of transparency; the more clear and glasslike the text, the more it reveals God’s face. In other words, the text becomes the medium through which we see God; a good translation, then, should not draw attention to itself with fancy words or convoluted syntax, but allow a clear vision of the Divine. This explains Tyndale’s insistence on simple language that even the ploughboy can understand, since such language would allow the greatest access to God. But knowing how to create such a glass/text is another matter, and so our clerics struggle with the idea of dark glass. Andrewes’ archdeacon, quoting Paul, interprets it in a very specific way:

When we were children, we spoke and understood as children. But now we are men, we put all that away. No longer seeing through the dark glass of ritual and superstition, but in full light, and face to face. To know, as we are known.

For him, as for Tyndale, the glass, darkened by Catholic “ritual and superstition,” obscures and obstructs a “face to face” interaction between man and God. But for Bishop Andrewes, who has been put in charge of translating a new Bible for King James, it is not as clear what darkens the glass. We learn that the young priest who smuggled out Tyndale’s papers was the young Lancelot Andrewes’ archdeacon and tried to teach him Tyndale’s lesson that love and mercy, as Jeremiah and Paul would say, must be “written on the heart.” The nameless priest-cum-

archdeacon is literally the voice of Tyndale for Andrewes; he not only attempts to impart the lessons Tyndale taught him, but quotes Tyndale's Scriptural translations to his young charge. But Andrewes cannot initially take this lesson of mercy to heart. We see him first mercilessly strip a church of its "rags of popery," hammering down its images of saints, forbidding the use of vestments, even seizing himself a golden chalice. During this process, a zealous proto-Puritan clerk, moved by Andrewes' staunch conviction, implores Andrewes to join his ascetic order; this is illegal, for it would mean separating from the official Anglican Church. The clerk extends his offer in the spirit of friendship, but later Andrewes has him arrested as a schismatic. When he visits the clerk in prison (a scene reminiscent of the young priest's visitation to the incarcerated Tyndale), Andrewes tries but fails to make the clerk repent. So he ruthlessly refuses the prisoner warm clothes in the winter, mocking the clerk's earlier puritan tendencies by saying, "In this [cold and dark cell] you are most happy. The solitary and contemplative life I hold most blessed." And in a particularly cruel moment, young Andrewes blows out the clerk's single candle, plunging him into darkness and denying him (as the Flemish keeper denied Tyndale) the solace of reading Scripture.

These acts of cruelty later return to haunt Bishop Andrewes in the form of Tyndale's ghost. Tyndale's reappearance posed a confusing moment for me, as it did for Andrewes. (It struck me as strange (another conjuring?) that Tyndale could haunt a man who'd never met him, but I suppose one could argue that the haunting occurs through Tyndale's words and his ideas, as they are passed down to Andrewes through the unnamed priest.) It is amazing to see how Andrewes deceives both himself and Tyndale. Initially, Andrewes does not recognize Tyndale. Ironically, he assumes Tyndale is a mover bringing him the final furnishings for his chapel. And when Tyndale asks who he is, Andrewes gives a white lie, claiming he is a member of the Bishop's household. But a workman arrives at that moment, delivering the last of Bishop Andrewes' requested furnishings; he addresses the Bishop and when Andrewes dismisses him, claiming that he is "in conference," the workman looks at him as if he's crazy. This is the moment when both Andrewes and Tyndale realize the other's identity and are able to give each other names; it is a wonderfully realized moment of double recognition, rendered in parallel lines:

**Andrewes:** You are an effusion of my mind.

**Tyndale:** And you are a Bishop.

Both men realize the extent to which they have been deceived or, perhaps, the extent to which they've deceived themselves. As the scene goes on, it becomes clear that Tyndale, if he is truly an "effusion of [Andrewes'] mind," is a manifestation of Andrewes' guilty conscience. This guilt over his own ruthlessness and hypocrisy has taken such a deep hold of Andrewes' mind that it could not be contained, and projected itself into what is essentially another self that Andrewes can converse with to work through his guilt. In this fantasy, Andrewes imagines himself as the opposite of Tyndale. If Tyndale is the passionate zealot, steadfast and certain, Andrewes is uncertain, the voice of compromise, trying to take the middle ground to ensure peace. While Tyndale is there, his will seems to overpower Andrewes'; the Bishop acquiesces to the decisive changes that Tyndale makes and notes them down as Tyndale dictates. We must remember, however, that if Tyndale's ghost is a conjuring of Andrewes' mind, some part of Andrewes' subconscious desires and justifies these changes. This subconscious, given form in the phantom Tyndale, is thus a part of Andrewes' self that his consciousness is usually unwilling to listen to. But in these circumstances, when it appears as such an authoritative figure as Tyndale, Andrewes can beguile himself into making changes that he wouldn't dare to make in the company of others. While the two are alone, they make steady progress and Andrewes, for the first time, seems filled with confidence as he rides in Tyndale's wake. But when the other translators arrive, interrupting his vision, Andrewes reverts to his prior uncertainty; instead of proudly presenting the changes as Tyndale might have, he tries to conceal his work, demurely belittles himself as only "one of fifty-four," and in his haste to hide the papers, accidentally spills ink on the changes he made, obscuring them from view. Later, when Prince Henry and his retinue arrive, Andrewes falls silent, allowing all the other clerics to decide on the translation.

Without the ghost of Tyndale there, Andrewes no longer has the will to voice his beliefs, ostensibly for fear of losing favor with his secular superiors. As he cleverly bides his time, he pretends to allow the group's changes to go to press, only some of which he (or Tyndale) would approve. That he stays silent in the face of his rivals' squabbling tells us implicitly that Andrewes has forfeited his claim to the archbishopric. Only after everyone has accepted the changes and left does Andrewes send to the printers the text that he and Tyndale revised, demonstrating that the King James version we have today is directly the result of Tyndale's

visionary inspiration. In the final scene, he explains his decision not to pursue the archbishop's position to his maidservant, Mary:

**Andrewes:** I would not spend my remaining days at breaking bones. In visitation to such men, and women, in their prisons, on their gallows, at the stake. Brave as they are. Right as they claim themselves to be, today, tomorrow, and for ever. So, I will not seek elevation. I will stay here, in this place, beneath these windows, with the beauty of these words, which John tells us were from the beginning. For I would see darkly, Mary.

**Mary:** Darkly, sir?

**Andrewes:** I would not see the fate of kings and princes. Not my fate, nor yours. Fearing that one day you will strip and smash and burn such places as this place once more.

In ceding a possible position as Archbishop of Canterbury to a rival, he sees himself as trying to step away from its complex politics. By receding back into a solitary and contemplative life, Andrewes chooses a purely religious life over one in which the clergy have secular ambitions. Andrewes characterizes this willful cloistering of himself as “see[ing] darkly,” which is a reference to 1 Corinthians 11-12:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Now that Andrewes has experienced the consequences of being a zealot, of acting without mercy, he realizes the cost in human lives of having such unswerving certainty as Tyndale had. By quoting this section from Paul, Andrewes implies that such conviction is a childish notion. Andrewes would rather “see through a glass darkly” and be able to comfort himself with the possibility that God is merciful rather than see a merciless God “face to face.” And if “God's face is a glass in which man sees himself,” as Tyndale asserts, the question becomes whether man himself is inherently merciful or not. Andrewes' experiences have suggested that man commits the most merciless acts on his brothers, and he wants no further part in it; his final lines are “I would not so see him.” Andrewes creates a rather dark and pessimistic image of man for us to contemplate at the end of the play.

**William Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1594)**  
**Director Michael Grandage**  
**Donmar Warehouse**

Thursday, January 5

After class, six of us went to *Belgo Centrale* for lunch. This was a Belgian restaurant that Dr. Peck recommended for seafood lovers. We each had a wonderful express lunch, which included a bowl full of steamed mussels, chips, and a glass of the house wine for only eight pounds! The food, people, and conversation made it one of the best meals I've ever had. Then, we only had to cross the street to arrive at the Donmar Warehouse, where we saw our first play of the day, Shakespeare's *Richard II*.

This was the only Shakespeare play we saw that was played in a traditional, straightforward manner, with no modernizations in either setting or costume. The company staged the play in a fairly minimalist manner with few props and almost no scene changes which, I think, had the effect of forcing the audience to focus on the motivations, actions, and speech of the characters. Of all the plays we saw, I think this was one of the most obviously literary in that its language, rather than any spectacle or music, was at its heart. I had been prepared to dislike the play, since I do not find Shakespeare's histories particularly compelling. But I found myself attuned to the beauty of the language, especially as Richard's loss of the crown causes him to question his very identity.

To understand Richard's self-conception of himself as king and its subsequent unraveling, we must look at the way Richard characterizes his relationship with his land. When Richard returns from his campaign in Ireland (after unjustly seizing the late Gaunt's lands to fund his army), he kisses the earth and says:

I weep for joy  
 To stand upon my kingdom once again.  
 Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,  
 Though rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs:  
 As a long-parted mother with her child  
 Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,  
 So, weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth... (3.2.4-10)

As king of England, his relationship with the land is characterized as a familial one. This is a familiar trope, but Richard inverts the typical order; instead of characterizing the earth as mother and humankind as her children, he calls himself the mother who has been "long-parted [from] her child [the land]." One might interpret this as a manifestation of Richard's megalomania, that

he dares to assume that he is parent of the land and that his “child” needs him so badly. Because Richard is heirless, one might also consider his mothering of the land as a way for him to imagine a substitute child and compensate for his failure as a fertile king. Or, one might take a more lenient view of Richard and read his maternal desires as an aspect of the king’s rightful role as guardian of his realm, his duty to protect the land from the “rebels that wound thee with their horses’ hoofs.” But this imagined parental relationship with England is called into question when we remember how arbitrarily Richard treated John of Gaunt’s lands, seizing them without just cause after Gaunt’s death and further antagonizing Bolingbroke. At the risk of literalizing the metaphor, one may ask what kind of parent snatches up another man’s orphaned child.

Later, when his queen is taken from him, Richard re-imagines a new relationship with his beloved England:

Doubly divorced! Bad men, you violate  
 A twofold marriage, 'twixt my crown and me,  
 And then betwixt me and my married wife.  
 Let me unkiss the oath 'twixt thee and me;  
 And yet not so, for with a kiss 'twas made.  
 Part us, Northumberland; I toward the north,  
 Where shivering cold and sickness pines the clime;  
 My wife to France: from whence, set forth in pomp,  
 She came adorned hither like sweet May,  
 Sent back like Hallowmas or short'st of day. (5.1.71-80)

Here, Richard describes his parting from the queen as a double divorce – one which parts him from his crown (and land) and from his lawfully wedded wife. His characterization of her as the May queen, a figure associated with the spring season and the revival of the land after winter, emphasizes Richard’s conceit that he is married to his land as much as to his queen. Given his previous characterization of the land as his child, this parting from his queen strikes him as a self-exile, a condition that we might think of madness. Richard feels not as if the queen is being exiled from the land, but that an essential part of himself is being painfully cloven from him – a schism reinforced by his thoughts of the inhospitable destinations awaiting both his wife and himself. The imagery of kissing recalls not only his wedding vows but also the kiss he gave previously to his native soil; thus the “unkiss[ing]” presages the unraveling or nullification of his vows as both husband and king.

In both of these passages concerning his relationship with the land, Richard represents himself as the dominant figure – either parent or husband – in a binary relationship. It seems

Richard only understands himself in relation his crown or his land; he can only conceive of himself in positions of power. When both the crown and land are taken from him, he loses his sense of identity. This is later made manifest in a curious scene in which Richard perceives his name as separate from himself. Here, he urgently commands, “Arm, arm, arm, my name!” (3.2.86) Rather than calling for his own armor, Richard asks his name to arm itself, as if it were a separate entity. Here, we see Richard’s anxiety over Bolingbroke’s usurpation, a move that threatens to rend Richard’s title as king from himself. It is the king who has to arm himself to defend his title, and here Richard tries to conceive himself as an entity separate from his title.

I felt Richard’s sense of loss and isolation most deeply in the mirror scene, in which Richard, stripped of his crown, marvels that his face in the looking-glass seems utterly unchanged despite the momentous events which have taken place. (In this production, the mirror scene cleverly echoed the deposition scene, in which we could clearly see Richard’s tortured face reflected in the polished gold of his crown, as both he and Bolingbroke held it between them.) Though his very sense of self has been compromised, his youthful reflection shows no signs of physical wear, and Richard reacts with violent accusations: “O flattering glass, / Like to my followers in prosperity, / Thou dost beguile me!” (4.1.279-81) Richard feels as if his mirror and his own face has betrayed him, failing to reflect the devastating loss of selfhood he feels. In the most poignant moment of the play, he hurls the traitor glass to the ground, where it shatters and he proceeds to accuse the new king of destroying him. For me, this moment was more heart-wrenching than even Richard’s final death scene. I was completely convinced by Eddie Redmayne’s portrayal of the unraveling king, played by turn grandiosely, wittily, and mawkishly. In this scene, Redmayne embodies indignation, rage, and agonized confusion, and I was pierced to the heart by his moving performance. For a king who is so aware of the performative aspect of his rule, Richard emotes his deep sense of loss with surprising honesty, a quality which I felt from Redmayne’s performance. It is only fitting that he received the Critics’ Circle award for Best Shakespearean performance.

Afterwards, a large group of about ten of us had dinner at another fabulous Indian restaurant. They served us the biggest naans I’ve ever seen. They were the size of large pizzas and required their own platters! (I have pictures to prove it!) We then headed back to central London to meet at Trafalgar Studios for our evening play, the opening night of Sartre’s *Huis*



*Clos*. Admittedly, I was pessimistic about the play because I tend to dislike anything existential, but the characters and their skillfully-played relationships proved gripping, and I came out of it with grudging admiration, mindful of the dangers of judging a play before seeing it.

**Jean Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos* (1943)**  
**Director Paul Hart**  
**Trafalgar Studios 1**

One of the central problems in Sartre's *No Exit* is the three characters' distinct lack of empathy. This, I think, makes it an interesting contrast to Hankin's *The Charity that Began at Home*, which we saw a few days later. While Hankin parodies the charity practiced by Hylton, he seems to present Margery's innocent desire to help others in a more positive light. Hylton's charity may come across as pedantic, even at times pretentious and patronizing, but Margery's seems based in an ability to put herself into the shoes of the unfortunate or guilty and feel true compassion for them, as well as believe in their ability to improve their moral character from these setbacks. Garcin, Inez, and Estelle – on the other hand – display no such capacity for empathy. By the end of the play, when all three have confessed the crimes that have landed them in hell, they all ostensibly understand the others' predicament. On a surface level, at least, they all “know” each other's plights. But unlike Margery, none of them is either able or willing to put themselves in each other's shoes, to experience their pain or guilt, and acknowledge the reality of each other's suffering.

Instead, each one is so entangled in their own complex knots of guilt, fear, and resentment that they turn these negative emotions outwards against each other, with the intention of tormenting their peers. Inez withholds her approval from Garcin, forcing him to confront his own cowardice and effectively unmanning him. Estelle, for her part, pronounces her condemnatory judgments on Garcin's masculinity whenever he doesn't fulfill her desires. And highly conscious of her own seductive beauty, she torments the lesbian Inez by caustically spurning her advances, and turning her feminine wiles ostentatiously on Garcin instead. The lone male in the group, Garcin is the most reluctant to deliberately torment his neighbors. Rather, he tries to withdraw into himself, trying to forget that there are other people here to interact with; he thinks that his salvation will lie in his own “self-communings” (Sartre 203). By doing this, he

ensures that he always has subjectivity; by refusing to interact with others, he denies them the opportunity to render him an object to be judged. But the others will not allow him such isolation. So he responds to their proddings by lashing out, and eventually gives as good as he gets. He alternately turns his romantic attentions to Estelle to torment Inez or withholds them to torment Estelle, whose greatest fear is being ignored (or unseen). The three are perfectly suited to become each other's torturers.

After their confessions, each one noticeably refuses to repent; they cannot reflect on their actions sufficiently to bring themselves to true regret. Rather, they proudly declare their lack of regret, but hypocritically desire compassion from their peers. They wallow in their own self-pity, yet are completely incapable of projecting it outwards onto others, to turn a compassionate eye onto their fellow sufferers. In a remarkable passage, Garcin claims that all of them are "naked" (Sartre 369) – that they've all confessed and bared the sins of their souls to each other's gaze – yet he is "all dried up" (Sartre 360) inside and cannot empathize. He does mention feeling pity for Estelle, but this patronizing pity is not equivalent to empathy, to a communion of experience that allows one to see the world through the other's eyes.

This ultimate isolation of oneself, this refusal to feel as others feel, this obsession with subjectivity paradoxically forces each character to define himself or herself not on their own terms, but through the eyes of others. The problem, though, is that these characters never allow themselves to let go enough to meaningfully inhabit someone else's shoes; rather they put themselves in others' places only to look for those attributes within themselves that they judge most important – beauty, masculinity, brutal honesty. In other words, when they imagine themselves through others' eyes, they actually inhabit both their own and another's consciousness, but privilege their own subjectivity over their viewer's. Early on, Estelle remarks in panic that there are no mirrors in the room and that her inability to see herself makes her feel as if she does not exist. She puts such great emphasis on her physical beauty that she constantly inhabits others' eyes, but only for the purposes of admiring herself; she judges her worth only on her sense of her own beauty. She is all surface with no depth. Garcin, too, judges himself based on what others think of him – either as a coward or an adulterer. His definition of manhood is defined by what he deems others' perception of him to be. Inez, in less obvious ways, also defines herself through others – she is more than willing to make herself an object of

desire for Estelle and she prides herself on her sadistic streak, taking pleasure in others' pain. Therefore, I contest Sartre's famous aphorism that "Hell is other people" (Sartre 319). While other people certainly exacerbate one's experience of Hell, the play suggests that Hell is actually oneself – especially a self so egotistical that it verges on solipsism. Hell is oneself, yet Sartre seems to suggest that Heaven can also lie within oneself – if he could only productively bridge the space between self and others.

**Eric Potts's *Cinderella* (2011)**  
**Director Christopher Dunham**  
**Richmond Theatre**

Friday, January 6

This morning, I napped before heading off with a large group to Richmond to see a *Cinderella* pantomime. It was by far our longest tube ride, one which was memorable for an unexpected power outage, which the conductor calmly announced to us. Apparently, this is a regular occurrence on the London underground, and our fellow commuters set the example for waiting patiently and (much to my relief), not panicking. Luckily, we'd left early enough so that the delay did not make us late. Upon arrival, however, we did not have time to grab lunch, and were forced to make a beeline straight for the Richmond Theater.

I can honestly say that I've never seen anything quite like the *Cinderella* pantomime. As an audience member, I have been accustomed to being at the receiving end of a presentation, which I passively experience and can later mull over in private. Any audience response other than applause or laughter (and even these have their proper time and place) are largely frowned upon and considered disruptive. I have never been asked to participate so fully in a performance. Given pantomime's target audience of grade school children, it makes sense that a production would be aware of their audience's short attention spans, and asking them to engage with the actors onstage is an ingenious way to counteract this. After the initial shock of seeing the actors encourage the noisy children to be even noisier, I found myself impressed by the many different ways in which we were asked to participate in the onstage action. Buttons, Cinderella's likeable and loyal friend, acts as our host and often guides our interpretation and reactions. Some types of participation were relatively simple, like Buttons' call and response (Buttons: "Whatcher, kids?" Us: "Whatcher, Buttons!"), while others comprised a more complicated and largely improvised

series of responses from both actors and viewers. One example came in the form of a game in which every time Buttons said “okay”, we were expected to respond with “all right.” While Buttons started us off with a few practice rounds, the game quickly sped up when Buttons (seemingly) inadvertently kept saying “okay” to which everyone continually responded according to the rules of the game. This had a comic effect as Buttons grew increasingly peeved at us both for continually interrupting him and for besting him in the game. The effect on the audience was to create a sense of exchange with the characters onstage – in reward for our participation, we were given 1) the satisfaction of directly effecting the action onstage, 2) a confirmation of our intelligence (in keeping up with and even excelling Buttons at his own game), and 3) a healthy dose of laughter.<sup>6</sup>

Cinderella’s two stepsisters, played by two men dressed in drag, were also locuses of audience participation. The children in the audience, accustomed to pantomime, knew exactly how they were supposed to react to these characters: the moment they appeared, a thunderous wave of booing assaulted the stage. Frankly, I was startled by the volume and suddenness of the children’s response. In any other setting, such catcalling would be considered incredibly rude and might result in one being asked to leave the theater, but here the actors took it in stride and even seemed to relish it. Indeed, they promptly returned the audience’s disdain with their own scripted insults, calling the viewers “ugly toads,” which elicited an even louder and more indignant response. Another instance where they enlisted our participation was in an enjoyable scene in which the stepsisters are lost in the woods and frightened of wild beasts; they ask us to help them spot these creatures so they can avoid them. When an enormous painted cardboard spider was lowered from the ceiling, the roar in the crowd was deafening and we were surrounded by an army of upraised hands, pointing urgently at the suspended spider. The stepsisters, overwhelmed by the noise, frantically looked everywhere except (of course) the correct spot and it is not until the spider rests atop one sister’s head that they finally discover its whereabouts. At this point, there is much laughter as the stepsisters run offstage, pursued by the

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, not all the jokes were as successful. Late in the play, as my attention was beginning to lag, we were subjected to the “busy bee” sequence, a gag that seemed juvenile even for this audience. It involved a clunky nursery rhyme, a countdown, a mouthful of water, and a predictable spit-in-the-face punch line for those stupid enough (read: the stepsisters) to fall for it. The gag, which was already not funny the first time, was reiterated thrice, dragging on for what seemed like an eternity. There was noticeable restlessness and shifting of bored bodies in seats until the sequence finally ended.

monstrous spider. Unlike our earlier game with Buttons, here the audience is unsuccessful in helping the sisters, but we still receive a pay-off of laughter at their terror because we're preconditioned to dislike them for their cruelty to Cinderella.

A final and rather ingenious way that the production elicited audience participation was in its song selection. Rather than composing original songs, our company chose to use the melodies of recognizable pop and musical theater songs, replacing the original lyrics with ones relevant to the Cinderella plotline. I heard the familiar strains of popular artists like Rihanna, Cee Lo Green, and Bruno Mars, as well as melodies from shows like Disney's *The Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and musical theatre like *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Jekyll and Hyde*. The simultaneous familiarity and novelty of such rewritten pop songs had an interesting effect. When the songs began, many of us turned to each other in either delight (at recognizing the song) or confusion (in trying to remember its title or artist). We would listen to the first verse and chorus in suspense to hear how they'd rewritten the lyrics. But by the second round of the chorus, I heard many children and even a few of our group attempting to sing along. Thus the music—including the final mash-up of the Blues Brothers (as sung by West End regular, Michael Ball) – encouraged everyone to join in the joyous experience of communal singing.

**St. John Hankin's *The Charity That Began at Home* (1906)**  
**Director Auriol Smith**  
**The Orange Tree Theatre**

After dinner at a local pub, we saw our evening show, *The Charity that Began at Home*, at the Orange Tree Theatre. I was quite surprised at the theater's intimacy; with its close quarters, small bar, and intimate seating, it quickly became one of my favorite theaters. I thoroughly enjoyed the play, although I wondered throughout who our protagonist was supposed to be. I was never sure who I was supposed to be sympathizing with – the winningly naïve but idealistic Margery or her well-intentioned but less charitable mother, Lady Denison? As it turns out, neither character develops as much as Hugh Verreker, a character with an Oscar Wilde-like sense of humor, who I initially thought would play a minor role. But he is a fascinating person. While his flippant lines early in the play characterize him as an amoral, if not totally frivolous, man, the last act reveals new depths to him as a character who is engaged (albeit reluctantly) in the very humanitarian

tenets he claims to detest. From the beginning, he and Basil Hylton are presented as rival suitors for Margery's hand. This is conveyed most noticeably in Verreker's apparent jealousy over the handkerchief-case that Margery is sewing for Mr. Hylton; he then convinces Margery to make one for him as well. Their discussion of the handkerchiefs' monograms – BH and HV – respectively shows the two men to be nearly perfect opposites vying for Margery's love. Hylton is, by all appearances, saintly and selfless – a quality that Margery emulates to perfection, while Verreker admittedly lives the indulgent life of a hedonist, wishing only to satisfy his own desires.

One might expect the genuinely charitable Margery to fall in love with Hylton, whose views mirror her own. So when she accepts the proposal of Verreker, an army deserter and debtor, one wonders at her motives. Does she truly love him? And, if so, is she foolish for doing so? Or does she let the ruling tenet of her life – helping others – take over her love life as well? Does she agree to marry Verreker solely for the purpose of reforming him? Is he, then, like the orphans that Margery goes to such great pains to find homes for? Her long monologue seems to suggest that the two motives are not mutually exclusive – that she can love Verreker precisely because he is flawed and that she hopes her love and livelihood can help him reform.

Verreker, however, cannot live within this patronizing relationship where he is constantly urged to spend hours writing letters for an orphanage he cares nothing about. At the dinner party in which he ends their engagement, he spins two diametrically opposing tales to secure her agreement to their break-up. In the first, he represents himself as a selfish man whose profligacy could not co-exist with her charity and would bring unhappiness to their marriage. But only after she has consented to break off the engagement does the “truth” come out. He claims that he actually broke off the engagement out of selfless love for her. As proof, he narrates a scenario in which he could marry her for her money, make only a nominal effort to emulate her charitable lifestyle, and then return to his prodigal ways afterwards. I was left unsure which of Verreker's stories to believe. But either way, one must admire Verreker's acuity of insight and his unprecedented compassion.

If the latter is true, then Margery has achieved her goal of reforming Verreker; he has performed an act purely for another's benefit, at great personal cost. The bitter irony, of course, is that in achieving her reformist goal, she loses the love of her life. Their farewell kiss proves awkward: while it is tender, she pulls away abruptly and disappointment strains her features.

This was – to me – her single sign of protest. Otherwise, she was ready (though reluctant) to let her “Hugh” go. Even though she remains a consistent do-gooder throughout the play, one cannot help but wish she would show more backbone – that she could occasionally concern herself with her own happiness. If she truly loved Verreker, one would expect her to fight for their marriage, to argue against him more vehemently, to protest against his cold reason. Yet she does not, and the audience is left with a great sense of loss. If Margery (and Hylton) are models of Christian virtue, is such virtue worth it? What value is such charity when one denies him or herself any chance at personal happiness?<sup>7</sup> By showing the admirable development of Verreker (indeed, all of the other characters seem stock and lack development), Hankin parodies the blindness of Hylton’s charitable deeds and even Margery’s innocent idealism.

I cannot end this entry without mentioning Oliver Gomm, the actor who played Verreker. Though his cutting remarks had already made him an audience favorite in the first act, his facial expressions added a priceless layer of humor to the second act. At one point, he seemed almost on the verge of breaking character and laughing at a particularly funny remark. Our proximity to the stage allowed us to witness every nuance of the moment. Gomm, whose face has a plasticity perfect for comedy, managed – barely – to stay in character, despite his facial contortions. But from that moment on, he seemed to dial up Verreker’s expressions to an almost self-parodying level. (His eyebrows were positively gymnastic!) At times I was uncertain whether this was a knowing wink at us, in acknowledgment of his near mistake, or whether his character was simply that ridiculous. Either way, it had the effect of engaging us even more deeply than before. The girls sitting in my corner (including me) kept a hawk-eyed vigil on Gomm’s face henceforward, and were often rewarded with moments of pure hilarity. This play turned out to be one of my favorites, in large part because of Gomm’s performance.

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<sup>7</sup> Ironically, this play’s message seemed directly at odds with the sermon we heard New Year’s Day at Westminster Abbey. There, the priest praised charitable gifts as an expression of God’s love and implicitly insisted that his listeners behave accordingly. Hankin’s play takes a decidedly more cynical view towards the concept of charity, exposing the pretentious motives of those who most preach it.

**John Hodges's *The Collaborators* (2011)**  
**Director Nicholas Hytner**  
**Cottesloe Theatre**

Saturday, January 7

After so much action in the past few days, I was ready to have a quiet morning. After class, I spent a couple peaceful hours in a local bookstore just outside our hotel. I browsed, read, and picked up a few books that I couldn't get in the States before having a quiet lunch at a nearby café. Disappointingly, I didn't get tickets to see *Billy Elliot*,<sup>8</sup> which a group saw as their matinee show today, but Jon and I were lucky to snag tickets to the *Collaborators*, playing at the Cottesloe in the National Theater. I was interested in its depiction of Mikhail Bulgakov, a Russian author who I'd "discovered" a few years ago when I read his masterpiece novel, *The Master and Margarita*, and fell in love. (Incidentally, I definitely caught strands of Bulgakovian humor, satire, and surrealism in the *Collaborators*. It made me wonder how familiar Hodges is with his work.) When I heard that Simon Russell Beale was playing the role of Stalin, I was hooked. I'd seen and admired his work in various BBC dramas, but only in deadly serious roles. I was not at all prepared for the hysterical, innovative, and moving production that I saw. This was one of my favorite plays of the entire trip, and I wish that everyone had been able to see it.

The aspect of the play that made it most enjoyable for me was its juxtaposition of humor with the nightmarish surrealism of a brilliant mind slowly going mad. One of the ways in which John Hodges depicts Bulgakov's slowly deteriorating mind is through another play. This play within a play crops up twice. The first occurrence happens when Yelena takes her husband to the doctor to discover the cause of Bulgakov's deteriorating health. Neither man shows any interest in diagnosing an illness; the Doctor is more interested in discussing an actress who once appeared naked in one of Bulgakov's plays while Bulgakov denies that anything is wrong with

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<sup>8</sup> Since then, I have managed to see the 2000 film version. Having read some of my peers' entries on the play, I wish I'd been able to see it in London. I'm curious about how the musical works the *Swan Lake* material to Billy's life. (I also recently saw Matthew Bourne's 1996 production of *Swan Lake* which features an all-male cast of swans. Adam Cooper, the principal dancer who played the swan prince is, coincidentally, the same dancer who portrays the adult Billy at the end of the film!) From youtubing, I've discovered that the *Swan Lake* scene involves Billy dancing with an imagined version of his older self, who eventually helps him to (literally) fly. Since I'm currently thinking about the *Collaborators*, it strikes me that Bulgakov in his quest to preserve his art (the same thing as Billy is pursuing) goes about it in a similar way, yet gets very different results. Like Billy in the *Swan Lake* scene, he unconsciously creates an alternate self to help him relieve the pressure placed on him by the suffocating politics of his time. But instead of giving him "solidarity" and strength to successfully see his way through (as Billy's does), his alter ego slowly destroys him with guilt.



him. As the Doctor distractedly draws blood from his patient's arm, we see a man enter the back of the stage in French dress (Molière), followed by a group of grotesquely masked Doctors and Apothecaries, all waving enormous knives and syringes. We wonder what is happening, but our upstage trio of Bulgakov, Yelena, and the Doctor are utterly oblivious to this strange group. The masked figures then begin chanting in Latin while closing in on Molière:

**Chorus:** Dignus est intrare / in nostro corpore  
[It is worthy to enter into our body]

**Molière:** Clisterum donare / Postea bleedare / afterwards...Purgare.  
[to give an injection, afterwards to bleed, afterwards to purge.]

(Hodge 13; translation mine)

One figure pulls a rolled-up diploma from his black robes and presents it with exaggerated flourishes to Molière, who suddenly crumples to the ground, screaming for help and writhing in pain. His body eventually stops twitching, signaling his death. The play referenced here is Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid*, a comedy. The play is supposed to end on a happy note, when Molière's character is awarded the status of a doctor – hence the diploma – during the gypsy ritual of the final scene. But during the play's fourth performance, Molière collapsed in the final scene and died onstage, a victim of pulmonary tuberculosis. In the context of the play within a play, then, these lines are meant to be triumphant, to celebrate the skills of injecting, bleeding, and purging of this new doctor. But they assume dark overtones when an actor unexpectedly dies during a performance.

At this point, Bulgakov's Doctor completes his blood-taking procedure and matter-of-factly tells his patient to return next week for his results. (We later discover that Bulgakov is fatally ill, although his disease is never named.) All three characters exit. Then, one of the masked figures steps forward and narrates for us what has just occurred in the background:

**Lagrange:** This day, while playing the role of Argon, Molière has collapsed on stage and was taken, unshriven, by the relentless hand of death. For this I shall mark the day with a black cross. What was the cause of it? Why did it happen? How shall I put it? The reason for this was the King's disfavour. (Hodge 14)

His speech is met with rounds of onstage applause and suddenly the Doctors and Apothecaries pull off their masks and meet an oncoming Bulgakov with cries of congratulations. And we realize that the eerie scene occurring in the background was the final scene of *Bulgakov's* play. Why include this playlet? Our protagonist clearly parallels the French playwright in several ways. Like Bulgakov's rebellious work, Molière's plays were threatened by government

ensorship (“the King’s disfavour”). He too suffered from a chronic illness, like Bulgakov’s kidney disease, which eventually killed him. And, this scene, Molière’s famous death which occurred as he was acting in his own play, foreshadows the drama of Bulgakov’s own death. One interpretation of the overlapping of these scenes is perhaps that Bulgakov was thinking of his Molière play as the Doctor was drawing his blood, trying to anticipate the audience reaction to his new play or contemplating his sense of kinship with the French playwright. Given the presence of doctors and syringes in both scenes, perhaps Hodges was drawing our attention to the sanctioned yet intrusive ways in which government officials (like Soviet doctors and academics) invade their citizens’ bodies and minds. Another way of interpreting this scene is as a surreal staging of time and space, in which the dream space of nightmare collides and slowly becomes indistinguishable with reality. The simple but eye-catching set helps communicate this feeling of disorientation; its raised circular platform extends outwards in unpredictable zigs and zags, highlighted by its bold color scheme of red blazes on white. As in this scene, we would often see two scenes being played at once – the main one on the central platform and another, which would start on a lower level and make its way up to center stage. In this particular scene, it felt like the Molière scene was playing out in Bulgakov’s subconscious and only when it assumed center stage with Lagrange’s final speech did it consciously register as a separate artistic work. Thus, the very stage functions almost like the interior space of Bulgakov’s mind, allowing several of his different thoughts to occur simultaneously.

The separation but simultaneity of these thoughts are later exacerbated when Bulgakov is coerced into writing a laudatory play for Stalin’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. This decision engenders a deep sense of guilt within him because working for the ruthless dictator of the totalitarian USSR goes against everything that Bulgakov believes in. Then, he is approached by an unexpectedly affable Stalin who offers to switch places with him; Stalin will take his place at the typewriter to author his own biography in hilariously hagiographic tones while Bulgakov is given the unenviable job of wading through Stalin’s stacks of paperwork. What begins as a whimsical experiment is gradually revealed to be a Faustian pact, one which requires our hero to make decisions which will result in the mass exile or executions of political dissidents, people with whom Bulgakov shares an ideological kinship. While Bulgakov is initially opposed, Stalin charms him into it and our protagonist becomes a condoning, if reluctant, party to the Great

Purge. Soon, Bulgakov's own friends, household members, and family are increasingly victimized by Stalin's policies; some disappear, some are arrested, and Bulgakov must deal with his own role in sanctioning this terror. Here, we see Bulgakov beginning to crack, and one might fear for his sanity or even suspect that this horrific event might cause a rift of Bulgakov's self-conception, resulting in a schizophrenic state.

In a crucial scene, Bulgakov, faced with Operational Order 0044 – which orders the mass rounding-up and execution of suspected political dissidents without trial – refuses to sign it. Stalin seems to accept his resolution. But later, we discover that Stalin signed off on it anyways and arrested Yelena. At this point, Stalin has completed his birthday play and confronts Bulgakov to sign it, authorizing it as “his” [Bulgakov's] work. When the playwright proves reluctant, Stalin gives an ultimatum: Bulgakov's signature for Yelena's life. And we learn the sinister truth about Stalin's motives in collaborating with Bulgakov:

**Stalin:** The truth is: it was all about you, Mikhail, all about you from start to finish. Killing my enemies is easy. The challenge is to control their minds. And I think I controlled yours pretty well. In years to come, I'll be able to say: ‘Bulgakov? Yeah, we even trained him. We broke him, we can break anybody.’ It's man versus monster, Mikhail. And the monster always wins. (Hodge 108)

Thus, it seems that Stalin planned the whole conspiracy in order to ruin Bulgakov's reputation, calling into question his status as a well-respected revolutionary writer, so Bulgakov would die in ignominy. It is only a few lines later, after Bulgakov acquiesces, signs the script, and readies himself for death that the eerie scene from the Molière play is repeated. The “monster” of Stalin's looming figure becomes embodied in the distorted figures of the masked Doctors and Apothecaries, brandishing their syringes. They surround the bed on which a despairing Bulgakov has sunk, chanting their Latin phrases which now take on new meaning:

**Chorus:** Dignus est intrare / in nostro corpore  
[It is worthy to enter into our body]

**Bulgakov:** Clisterum donare / Postea bleedare / afterwards...Purgare.  
[to give an injection, afterwards to bleed, afterwards to purge.]

(Hodge 109; translation mine)

In the earlier scene, Molière recited the second lines, but here the theatrical and “real” worlds mesh together so that the writer Bulgakov assumes the role of Molière in the play and speaks the lines. Where Bulgakov was literally receiving an injection earlier (in the blood-drawing scene), here the invasive element is a bullet to the brain. And the final word “purgare” takes on a cynical

connotation, in its association with Stalin's horrific Great Purge, of which Bulgakov now becomes a victim. After these lines are spoken, Bulgakov is shot. And during Lagrange's final monologue, it looks as if Stalin's henchmen will break their word and kill Yelena too. But as she kneels with her eyes tightly closed, awaiting the fatal bullet, she is spared. Everyone save her exits the stage, leaving her alone. She touches her husband's corpse in horror and is startled out of her reverie by the strident ringing of the phone. When she answers it, we receive the final shock of the play. We hear Stalin's gruff voice, asking "Is it true? Is it true Comrade Bulgakov is dead?"

The implication, of course, is that this entire Faustian deal between Bulgakov and Stalin, the signing off of the Great Purge orders, and the collapse of Bulgakov's world occurred in Bulgakov's mind. The charming yet chilling Stalin we met was a construct that grew out of Bulgakov's tormented mind, one that might first have been used to displace his guilt (so that it seemed that it wasn't Bulgakov writing the play), but later only increased his sense of culpability. In other words, Bulgakov unconsciously split his identity into his own and (his construction of) Stalin's, a schizophrenic state which allowed him a means of coping with his guilt. Having witnessed the very real events of the Purge happening around him, Bulgakov constructed a story in which he was responsible for the arrests and deaths of his loved ones – as a manifestation of his guilt – and then invented Stalin's conspiracy to displace his guilt once again. Given this new information, we were now able to read the final scene with Yelena as one in which she found Bulgakov's corpse in bed as a result of his suicide and then had a conversation with the real Stalin on the phone. It provided a powerful ending to a very engaging play.

Afterwards, Dr. Peck and Ruth treated us to a lovely dinner at the National Theater before we reconvened at the hotel to split off into our three separate groups. My group, headed by Dr. Peck, had to brave the streets on a cold English night to find the New Diorama Theatre. It turns out that it is located in a distinctly un-theatrical part of town, hidden amidst a complex of business-like high-rises. The entire complex felt like a shopping mall, complete with fountains and a large animated billboard of a fashionable walking woman. It was a strange place for a theatre, especially one which staged such a minimalist production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

**William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601)**  
**Director Indhu Rubasingham**  
**New Diorama Theatre**

I felt that the humorous characters in this production worked best, especially Malvolio, Maria, and Feste. For me, Malvolio stole the show. The hilarious scene in which he discovers Maria's forged letter worked particularly well. Gareth Fordred, who played Malvolio, recited his monologue almost directly to the audience. We were seated in the second row and he came so close that his sight line matched ours. At times, he met our eyes and seemed to speak directly to us. At times, we were laughing in his face, but Fordred never once broke character, and his seeming oblivion to our hysterics made the scene even funnier (and, to me, seems a remarkable feat of will on Fordred's part). When he spoke my favorite lines of the play, his triumphant "I will be strange, stout, in yellow stockings, and cross-gartered," (2.5.190) he looked at me, and I could not help but giggle. But at the same time, it was a bit uncomfortable; Fordred played Malvolio's glee at Olivia's secret love and his lofty aspirations to climb the social ladder so earnestly that I felt a bit guilty laughing at him. I felt rude doing it, even though the scene is meant to be funny. He was certainly physically close enough to have broken the fourth wall and really hammed it up, but he didn't. But, as audience members, we were highly aware of how close he came to doing it, and this tension heightened both the humor and drama of the scene. By playing this scene so earnestly to the audience (but never acknowledging our reactions), Fordred established in us a fondness for Malvolio that would later render him a sympathetic character.

Another aspect that added to the comedy of this scene was the way the company staged the background action, in which Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, and Fabian eavesdrop on Malvolio from behind a tree. Because the production was so minimalist and there were no props to represent trees, actors actually played the trees and shrubbery. To represent the tree, several actors stood clustered together, turning their backs to the audience, and posed dramatically with their arms uplifted and held stationary. Andrew, Toby, and Fabian then played their scenes around these human props, obscuring themselves behind them, peeping out to recite their lines, and occasionally creeping silently forward in delight. At one point during Malvolio's soliloquy, he turns around and glances towards the tree. The three tricksters, who've all crept out from behind the tree to better hear Malvolio's speech, must think quickly to avoid being seen by Malvolio. Instead of rushing back behind the tree, they simultaneously stretched out their arms and froze,

pantomiming the human trees behind them. This got a hearty laugh from the audience not only because it worked (partially because of Malvolio's heightened emotions and self-absorption), but because it self-consciously parodied a stage convention used by this specific production.

Human props also figured into Malvolio's infamous dark room scene. And while the scene was still funny, the way these human props were used also effectively conveyed Malvolio's terror. The lights were turned off and only two spotlights afforded us any vision of the stage. The brighter one highlighted the character of Feste, who was impersonating Sir Topas, a priest summoned to perform a mock exorcism on Malvolio. This Topas was dressed in rags, and sported a sombrero and a banjo; he was positioned behind Malvolio so that Malvolio couldn't see him. Feste's appearance was not in the least frightful, but the immobilized Malvolio reacts with real fear, and this incongruity intensified the comedic effect. As Sir Topas, Feste assumed a drawling Southern accent. His speech evoked the persona of a Baptist evangelist, effectively conveying the pretentious religious overtones suggested by the exorcism. The dimmer spotlight focused on Malvolio, whose body was entirely restrained as if in a straitjacket. But instead of using a costume, the company used actors to mime the straitjacket. Several actors stood or crouched behind Malvolio and wrapped their arms around his body. Several hands even gripped Malvolio's head, so that his face was obscured and only his frightened eyes and mouth were exposed. The effect of having people portray this straitjacket heightened my awareness that it was Malvolio's peers who were playing this cruel trick on him; the hands physically trapping him literalized the human capacity for ruthlessness that can deliberately and spitefully enact such cruelty against its fellow man. The darkness of the set, broken only by Feste and the terrified Malvolio, made me feel pity for the maligned Malvolio.

In Malvolio's final scene, he learns not only that Olivia doesn't love him, but that he's been thoroughly duped by people he considers his inferiors. Fordred walked onstage with a limp, leaning on a crutch – implying that his stint in the dark room had involved physical abuse. The audience, I think, reacted with a double consciousness; we could simultaneously laugh at the absurdity of the prank played on him and sympathize with him for his victimization by a trick taken too far. His progressive incredulity, indignation, humiliation, and outrage was believable. I felt a lump in my throat at Malvolio's final lines, "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you." His voice broke halfway through the line before he limped offstage. I was moved by him and felt

a sense of pity for Malvolio that I'd never experienced before. Many Shakespeare enthusiasts judge the quality of a *Twelfth Night* production on whether or not one sympathizes with Malvolio's plight at the end. Fordred's performance as Malvolio, then, was a success to me.

Although there were some disappointing aspects to this play, I'm glad I saw it. Although *Twelfth Night* is one of my favorite Shakespeare comedies, I had never been particularly enamored of these hijinks; I'd preferred instead to focus on the central gender-bending drama unfolding around Viola, Olivia, and Duke Orsino. This production reversed that dynamic for me. I didn't find these protagonists particularly compelling, although Derval Mellett, who played Olivia did bring an unexpectedly potent sexuality to her character. Rather, I consistently found myself longing to see more of the comic relief. And I particularly enjoyed Lachlan McCall's performance as Feste. Although Feste plays many roles (the wise fool, the "corrupter of words," the Lord of Misrule, the breaker of the fourth wall), I was most impressed with his last soliloquy, which ends the play. Others, including Dr. Peck, mentioned that they were disappointed in the quality of music in the play, but I was genuinely moved by Feste's final song. Deeply at odds with the play's happy ending, it describes the life journey of a man who encounters disappointment at every stage of his life:

When that I was and a little tiny boy,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
A foolish thing was but a toy,  
For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came to man's estate,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,  
For the rain, it raineth every day.

But when I came, alas! to wive,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
By swaggering could I never thrive,  
For the rain, it raineth every day.

But when I came unto my beds,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
With toss-pots still had drunken heads,  
For the rain, it raineth every day.

A great while ago the world begun,  
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain.

But that's all one, our play is done,  
And we'll strive to please you every day. (5.1.398-417)

Its melody is already quite melancholy, but there was something about hearing McCall's rendition of it – accompanied by only his banjo – that spoke to me. Perhaps it was the sober sincerity with which Feste addressed us (without any of the jaunty energy of Ben Kingsley's version in the 1996 film). Perhaps it was his unassuming offer of the song to us as a gift – to make of it “what [we] will,” which is the subtitle of the play. Perhaps it was the absurd juxtaposition of Feste's disheveled appearance (barefoot, untucked shirt, suspenders, a ridiculous sombrero slung around his neck) versus the solemnity of his song that made the moment poignant for me. Or perhaps it was the dramatic staging: Feste, spotlighted against the back wall, sang as the lights dimmed, and on his last note, all lights went out, plunging us into a darkness which was silent, but resonant with reflection. Whatever it was, Feste's final song combined with Malvolio's recent exile, moved me and put me in a quite a pensive mood that I wasn't expecting at the end of a Shakespearean comedy.

**Mike Bartlett's *13* (2011)**  
**Director Thea Sharrock**  
**Olivier Theatre**

Sunday, January 8

Sara, Deb, Lauren, Caitlin, and I grabbed lunch at the Upper Crust, a food stand in Waterloo Station that serves very large and tasty pasties. It was a very informal meal; we sat on a bench in the station and chatted. Deb recorded some video of us among the London lunchtime bustle. Then we walked over to the Olivier Theatre for our matinee.

I was one of the many students who was frustrated by Bartlett's production of *13* because I felt like it had great potential to be a deeply affective play, but failed to draw me in sufficiently in the second act. The opening very much intrigued me. I was drawn in by the cryptic effect of the rotating cube, the voiceover which narrated the thirteen characters' shared nightmare, and the illuminated time of 7:13. I very much enjoyed seeing the separate stories of our characters and realizing how they were all somehow connected through the figure of John. But all of these different storylines that converged around John's return and his knowledge of everyone's nightmares seemed to suggest that some sort of supernatural, possibly even apocalyptic,



conclusion would end the play. However, we got nothing of the sort; instead, the rapid pace of the first half slowed dramatically in the second half and the compelling plot of the shared dreams was largely abandoned in favor of a long-winded and heavy-handed political debate between the PM Ruth, Mark Crossley, and John.

What I found most compelling about the play were the ways in which theme of technology created its surreal, dream-like aura. The central figure of the play, an enormous blue cube (reminiscent of the Tardis!), served as any building which was needed to house the practical needs of the play – for example, as the shop window into which Esther rammed her shopping cart in protest, the law firm in which Amir is arrested, the Alpha Group's church-like dwelling, the Prime Minister's Residence, John's speaking platform, and even the shared mausoleum-like sleeping space for all thirteen characters. To me, the cube seemed to represent different things at different times. Sometimes it was a box functioning to contain and trap people and ideas, as when it represents the repressive space of a religious institution, legal system, or governmental body. At these times, it seemed a barrier designed to keep certain people or ideas out. At other times, most notably when all thirteen characters sleep within it, the cube seemed like a unifying device, something enclosed but with separate interconnected units. The way in which the cube was illuminated from within with blue streams of light connecting the various sleepers reminded me of a circuit or, perhaps more tellingly, of a human brain. And each character seemed to be one branch or aspect of human consciousness.

I saw this theme of human consciousness and technology running throughout the play. At the beginning, the characters all sleep within an enormous alarm clock. At the end, each of the thirteen grasps an ipad-like device that illuminates their faces with news of the upcoming war. Each speaks a line or two before their device goes dark, coalescing into a black box, and they step back into the darkness of the opened cube. This final scene illuminated the way in which our experience of the world is profoundly shaped by the mass media's influence. On the one hand, this can be a good thing – a pool of collective knowledge from which we all draw and can all understand each other through; in Freudian terms, the mass media and its technology provide a sort of collective consciousness. Perhaps Bartlett is pointing out this very fact – that the mass media, for better or worse, has become an institutionalized part of our culture, as deeply embedded in our culture as any political or religious body. And it is – through social networking

– giving many individuals a voice that they otherwise couldn't make heard. (These ideas might be interesting to think about in the context of the next play, in which Lee Hall asserts his opinions on culture.) But simultaneously, this collective consciousness, like the blue box, can entrap and restrict freer, more individualized modes of thought and inquiry. Each character's reliance on the media seemed to trap them all into collective despair, which they all projected into a nightmare of an impending doomsday. Bartlett's play seems at once to celebrate the unifying potential of the media but also warn of its beguiling dangers.

**Lee Hall's *Pitmen Painters* (2007)**  
**Director Max Roberts**  
**Duchess Theatre**

Monday, January 9

Today, four of us visited the Tate Modern before our evening play. We saw all sorts of modern art, much of which – I admit – went over my head. When I saw an exhibit that featured a hexagon painted off-white on a white wall, I felt a bit cheated. It spurred a discussion about what art is and what purpose art serves in our world. Our discussion continued as we crossed the Waterloo Bridge on a bitterly cold evening, and we were treated to a beautiful view of the Thames and London's lights at night. It was a perfect prelude to accompany our walk to the Duchess Theatre, where we saw *Pitmen Painters*, a play centrally concerned with the very issues we'd discussed.

I must preface my discussion of *Pitmen Painters* with the admission that I loved this play and was thoroughly moved by it. It addresses questions that scholars in the humanities are always asking ourselves, if only to reaffirm the relevance of our work. Big-picture questions like “What is the function of art in society?” or “What relevance do works of high art have for ‘normal’ people?” often get lost in the midst of scholarship that tends to become either densely factual or highly theoretical. I think we often forget that even the most sophisticated work of art originates, in one way or another, from a shared culture, a collective heritage of ideas, values, and beliefs that inform our daily lives. Any attempt to “own” or otherwise restrict access to art, as the WEA official George pompously does, is wrong-headed. As writer Lee Hall states, “Culture is something that we all share, and we are all the poorer for anyone excluded from it.” *Pitmen Painters* captures this grassroots approach to art by demonstrating how an unlikely group

of impoverished Ashington “pitmen,” or miners, are able to translate their experience of working in the perilous mines into unique paintings. Although they initially just want to “be able to look at a painting and know what it means,” as one pitman bluntly puts it, they quickly gain more a more nuanced view of painting as they begin to practice it together. Together, they explore what it means for an artist to represent a human body unrealistically. Some of them want their art to depict the world accurately like a snapshot. Others realize the value of painting in a more abstract or impressionistic manner. In one moving scene, an unnamed lad – an unemployed young man who has endured much bullying from George – gets fed up with a painting of pretty dogs. In frustration, he shows the group an example of “real art.” His model is Picasso’s famous *Guernica*, which shows in harshly angular figures and a grim palette of black, white, and grey the terror and carnage of a city ravaged by bombs. The lad asserts that this is art which is “true” because it shows the brutal reality of their lives; it captures the horror of the war occurring on the Continent. And it strikes him so viscerally that he leaves his home to enlist in the army. This painting does not just set the lad aflame with appreciation, but actually moves him to act, to go out and try to change the world. So far, he has only been able to identify himself in negative terms – someone unemployed, someone not fully accepted into the Ashington Group, someone whose voice and opinions are routinely silenced or ignored. The *Guernica* allows the youth to invest his life with positive meaning, to act in a manner that will, in his mind, make a difference. It helps him to form a new identity, as an active and patriotic soldier. While such a reaction is inspiring, Lee Hall does not allow us to idealize the lad’s enthusiasm over art. Later, we discover that the youth dies in battle.

In another scene, Oliver – who has painted something unexpected in response to Professor Lyons’ assignment – describes how once he latched onto his idea, it seemed to take on a life of its own and possess him. Appropriately, he entitles his painting “The Deluge,” representing not only the depicted content, but also the joyous, unstoppable outpouring of his aesthetic inspiration. When contrasted with the menial yet mortally dangerous nature of the Ashington Group’s work, one can see how appealing the act of painting – of creating something that comes totally from one’s own mind – becomes. In Oliver’s and the rest of the group’s paintings, we see the pitmen using their art as a catharsis, to work through the fears and frustrations of their everyday lives. We see how their experiences lend them unique perspectives,

whether it be through playing with light and dark, the exaggeration of a human body, or the appreciation for a simple shape. Oliver's work eventually catches the eye of a wealthy patroness, Helen Sutherland, who offers to fund his work – a proposition which utterly confounds Oliver. He cannot imagine getting paid more than his pitman's wages for doing something as unproductive as painting. But he feels most threatened by Helen's ability to separate him from his community of fellow pitmen, to sever his ties to the only life and job he has ever known. When she makes a condescending comment, Oliver reacts explosively, vehemently defending his identity as a pitman. This is the only scene in which we see Oliver so openly emotional.<sup>9</sup> He clearly feels as if taking her offer would be selling his soul, compromising not only his art to her demands, but obliterating his very self-identity. Underlying this idea of selling out is a suspicion that Oliver would not be able to create art under the patronage of Helen because he would no longer be a pitman, which has ultimately been the source of his aesthetic inspiration. Thus, we can see how fundamental art can be to helping one form his identity.

**Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* (1982)**  
**Director Lindsay Posner**  
**Old Vic Theatre**

Tuesday, January 10

This morning, a large group of us went to the Natural History Museum with Dr. Peck. I was excited to see the dinosaur fossils and mammalian exhibits. All of us were awed by the marine life exhibit, which featured a number of life-sized whale models hanging from the ceiling. The blue whale was indescribably massive and dwarfed everything else. We got a number of nice photos there and had lunch at a nearby Thai restaurant, before returning to goof off in the museum's gift shop. Deb, Kieran, and I returned early to meet up with Becca for high tea at the British Museum. It was quite an affair. Each of us received, in addition to tea, a three-tiered

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<sup>9</sup> Trevor Fox, who played the role of Oliver, deserves a special mention. He gave a wonderful performance as a gruff, craggy miner struggling with his emergent talent as an artist. Fox's portrayal demonstrates in an understated manner the depth to which Oliver is moved by his process of painting. Fox is so sincere that I was immediately drawn in, and felt as if I was accompanying Oliver in his discovery, with his awakening sense of wonder, of unlimited potential, of his calling. The most introspective of the lot, Oliver wins us over with his combination of pitman practicality, quiet dignity, and fierce loyalty. His character is so compelling that it makes the ending, in which all the miners' hopes come to nought, all the more poignant. We admire Oliver for refusing to sell out, but wish that he could've received the recognition he deserved for his unique talents.

platter – containing scones and clotted cream, a variety of finger sandwiches, and a number of desserts. It was enough food to substitute for dinner, but all of us agreed it was greatly overpriced.

Luckily, we only had one play today. I say “luckily” because the amount of energy I expended laughing at the Old Vic’s revival of *Noises Off* could easily have accounted for two plays. For me, this was easily the funniest play of our trip. It was a treat for me to see Robert Glenister, who played the director Lloyd, in a comedic role. I’ve seen his work in a number of quality BBC dramas, most notably as a mild-mannered “fixer” in *Hustle* and a shady Home Secretary in *Spooks*. Neither role quite prepared me for the outrageous megalomania and exaggerated world-weariness he displayed in this performance.

The crux of the play’s humor, for me, relied on Lloyd’s belief in the first act that he could impose some sort of control over his third-rate cast by rehearsing them to death. Lloyd apparently has a sort of God complex, in which he can stand apart self-importantly and yet still have his hands in every aspect of the play. But this illusory sense of control melts away by the second act, when Lloyd returns from directing Shakespeare’s *Richard III* to watch a matinee performance of his other pet project, *Nothing On*. He tries to remain purely a viewer, but the disastrous events occurring backstage prompt him to repeatedly try to exert control over the situation. These scenes are funny not just because we see him quickly losing his grip on the actors, but because his hypocrisy is revealed. He wants to stand aloof as the judgmental director and watch his chess-pieces move in harmony, but he’s also inextricably involved with the unfolding backstage romances. Here, we learn about Lloyd’s womanizing tendencies; he is carrying on two affairs simultaneously – one with the vacuous pin-up, Brooke, who spends much of her time onstage in her underwear, and the other with Poppy, the overly-emotional assistant stage manager. Both women eventually discover Lloyd’s infidelity and he becomes involved in a number of backstage hijinks trying to reconcile with an indignant Brooke, whilst ignoring the pleas of an unbeknownst-to-him pregnant Poppy. He keeps paying the stagehand, Tim, to run out and buy flowers for him to give to Brooke. Simultaneously, he tries to converse with her between her scenes, bosses around his assistant stage managers, and runs around trying to prevent Selsdon from growing too drunk. The flowers, like the sardines of the first act, become symbolic of Lloyd’s loss of control. As they become misplaced, missent, trampled on, rejected, or otherwise

lost, Lloyd keeps shelling out cash for new ones and the bouquets keep multiplying onstage. Their increasingly grotesque profusion echoes the inevitably quickening spiral of chaos that eventually spills over visibly onto the stage of *Nothing On*. In one memorable instance, Tim has apparently bought so many flowers that he's depleted the florist's supply, so he returns with a potted cactus, which he absent-mindedly leaves on a chair. Not only is the absurdity of a cactus as a make-up gift funny, but Lloyd ends up getting the business end of the phallic-shaped plant rammed into his bottom when he tries to sit down. The physical comedy is then topped by having Belinda, another attractive actress, witness Lloyd's plight and graciously help him pick the embedded spines out of his pants. At that moment, Brooke enters the backstage area to see another woman with her hands all over her former lover's buttocks. Of course, she misreads the image and this sends her into a new round of hissy indignation. These various types of humor – absurd substitutions, physical comedy, misreadings, repetition and profusion – add so many comic moments to the play that the audience is kept in constant uproar.

At the end of both the second and third acts, Lloyd's plotline takes on new dimensions of humor. The second act ends with the incompetent Selsdon onstage, where he forgets his lines, and is supplied with whispered lines from backstage. Simultaneously Poppy finally gets Lloyd alone, tells him of her pregnancy; Lloyd, in his astonishment, repeats Poppy's revelation in a shout, so that Selsdon mistakes them for his lines and announces Poppy's pregnancy to the entire audience. Lloyd is left utterly bewildered and embarrassed, inescapably caught up in the very dramas that, as a director, he should have separated himself from. His pretensions at a God-complex are reversed in the final act. The unresolved backstage romances have finally caused things to unravel badly onstage and the alcoholic Selsdon cannot be found to conclude *Nothing On*'s first act. So, Tim the stagehand/understudy appears onstage in Selsdon's costume (a striped prison jumpsuit), dutifully reciting his lines. Belatedly, Selsdon crashes through the window to assume his role, flustering poor Tim and sparking a laugh from us. Finally, when the plot has utterly devolved into incomprehensibility, Lloyd – hoping to save the day – breaks through the window also attired in Selsdon's costume, only to see two other versions of his character already populating the stage. By this point, we were all in hysterics because Lloyd the director has degenerated into just another incompetent actor, indistinguishable from his cast. This unraveling

of Lloyd's pretensions and his loss of control were, for me, among the funniest aspects of the play.

**Richard Bean's *One Man, Two Guvnors* (2010)**  
**Inspired by the play *Servant of Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni**  
**Director Nicholas Hytner**  
**Adelphi Theatre**

Wednesday, January 11

Dong and I started off the day by visiting the British Library, where we hoped to see the Magna Carta and the illuminated manuscripts. I wish we'd had more time to explore because there were a number of interesting exhibits, but we were in a bit of a rush. On our way out, we stopped by Platform 9 3/4 of Harry Potter fame outside of King's Cross station for a few quick photos. I was seriously underwhelmed, but I'm glad I went. We then met up with Katie in Chinatown for an amazing lunch at a Japanese restaurant. Completely full, we had to hustle through the West End to get to the Adelphi Theater for our matinee.

Besides *Noises Off*, *One Man, Two Guvnors* was easily the funniest play we saw. It certainly defied my expectations of what West End theater comprises. Although I have some background in Italian literature, what I know about *commedia dell'arte* is purely academic; I'd never seen any *commedia dell'arte* plays. And while I knew this type of play is popular (as opposed to high art) and involves improvisation, I was not prepared for just how much lowbrow humor and improvisatory freedom I saw onstage. The humor of *One Man, Two Guvnors* worked in a way that was the complete opposite of *Noises Off*'s humor. While Michael Frayn's humor can only function if every actor has rehearsed to the point where his or her every movement is tightly controlled, timed, and executed to perfection, the core of Richard Bean's humor relies largely on giving actors loose rein to improvise, interact with, and play off the audience.

James Corden, who played our protagonist Francis, broke the fourth wall from the beginning by talking directly to the audience the moment he was alone onstage. He spoke to us as if we were old chums, complaining about his unemployment, his constant hunger, and – once he began working for two masters – his inability to tell his two jobs apart. In one memorable scene, Francis chose two audience members to come up onstage to help him lift a particularly heavy trunk. With great ado, he directed each man to either end of the large trunk, counted them

off, and when they simultaneously heaved upwards, he stood on top of the trunk to make their task even more difficult. Nonetheless, the two men – reluctant as they seemed – managed to lift the trunk, Francis and all, a good foot or so off the ground. It seemed a feat of surpassing strength, and Corden was impressed by their accomplishment. Flushed with delight, he admitted to us that this had never happened in any of his performances; never before had the audience members been able to move the trunk an inch. This brought on a great round of spontaneous applause which Corden graciously participated in – much to the bashful gratitude of the two audience members.

In another apparently unscripted moment, the perpetually-hungry Francis casually asks the audience if anyone has a sandwich. To everyone's surprise, someone in the front rows actually held up a wrapped sandwich. Though clearly startled, Corden used his shock to good effect, asking the participant what he thought he was doing with a sandwich in his pocket at a West End theater! Amidst great waves of laughter, Corden bantered back and forth with the man. As spectators excited by this unexpected moment, we learned what type of sandwich it was (hummus) and what Corden thought of that (he hates hummus). Although it was a relatively small moment in a long play full of hysterical moments, I feel it was a memorable one partly because of its spontaneity. Professional reviewers apparently feel the same. I read a review in which the author reported that at another performance of that sandwich moment, an audience member responded by actually throwing a package of pork pies onstage! I wish I could've been there to see how Corden reacted and what hilarity ensued. I rarely feel this way about a show; rather, if I want to see a play again, it is only to relive and reinforce the performance exactly as it was – to recreate a special experience that I could not otherwise recapture. But knowing that each performance of the same play could contain such moments of radical difference is novel for me, and adds a new layer of excitement.

One of my favorite moments of the entire play did not involve anything that happened onstage. Rather, because our seats were relatively close to the stage, I had a good view of the skiffle band – who sat on the ground level underneath the stage between their performances. During the scene in which Francis chooses an audience member to help him serve both his masters dinner simultaneously, my eye strayed to the band members. Despite having witnessed what must have been dozens of performances, all four musicians were rapt by the action onstage,



laughing and applauding along with the audience, and obviously enjoying the fresh hijinks that were ensuing with a new audience participant. It was a lovely moment, showing that the performers themselves enjoy each show as much as first time viewers do.

After this highly entertaining show, we headed to our University of Rochester sponsored dinner at the French restaurant, Mon Plaisir. It is located in the Covent Garden district of London, a very posh neighborhood. An evening stroll through the area reveals charming sets of lights, shaped like Christmas bells, and strung in decorative arches over the cobblestone streets. We enjoyed a wonderful three-course meal, in a cozy room at Mon Plaisir. Discussion centered around our favorite plays and sights in London so far. We were able to meet Mrs. Jennifer Patterson from the university's Public Relations and Alumni Affairs, who helps make our trip possible. She joined us for dinner, having just hopped off an international flight, but did not look any the worse for wear. She even came bearing gifts, giving each student a deluxe University of Rochester-branded pen! After a much-needed cup of coffee, we merely had to cross the street to enter the Cambridge Theater for one of our most anticipated plays, *Matilda the Musical*.

**Dennis Kelly and Tim Minchin's *Matilda the Musical* (2010)**  
**Based on the book by Roald Dahl**  
**Director Matthew Warchus**  
**Cambridge Theatre**

Like another children's production we had seen, *The Heart of Robin Hood*, *Matilda* made great use of spectacle. The set, hung all over with colored letter blocks (to evoke a Scrabble board game), was simply fantastic. But this spectacle also reinforced one of the play's most important themes – the connection between the procreative potential of a child's imagination and its expression in language and storytelling. While the imagination of an individual is, by necessity, a private realm, the expression of imagination in language allows those ideas to become communal – communicated to and shared by others. Indeed, *Matilda's* imagination becomes not only a form of therapy for her troubled psyche, but also a shared space of sympathy and healing for the play's abused female characters.

Like the eponymous character from Roald Dahl's book, *Matilda's* imagination empowers her first to escape from the oppressive adults in her domestic and school life and, later, to fight

back against Miss Trunchbull's unjust punishments. Unlike the character in the book, Matilda conjures up for herself a fantastical genealogy which eventually proves to be true, albeit not for herself, but for her supportive teacher, Miss Honey. Much of Matilda's imaginative energy is spent during her time in the library where she not only digests books by the dozens, but also becomes a storyteller herself. The tales she tells Mrs. Phelps, the local librarian, all involve the thrilling adventures of a husband-and-wife team of circus performers – a handsome escapologist and a lovely acrobat – who only want to have a child, but are unable to conceive. In despair, they enact a death wish by announcing that they'll perform a death-defying stunt which combines both of their specialized skills. But just before their performance, the acrobat discovers that she has successfully conceived. Both potential parents want to cancel the stunt, but the acrobat's cruel Trunchbull-like sister who is involved in the business of their trade, balks at the idea of returning the customers' money and produces a contract obligating them to perform or risk lifetime imprisonment. They are forced to go through with the risky stunt.

Matilda narrates this scene so dramatically that Mrs. Phelps almost cannot distinguish the story from real life; the librarian hangs on Matilda's every word and we too are enraptured by Matilda's engaging narration, which is enhanced by the marvelous staging of her story. Up to this point, the escapologist and acrobat of Matilda's story have been played by actors in bespangled circus costumes, miming their actions over Matilda's narrating voice. But when it comes time to show the death-defying stunt itself, the live actors are replaced by shadow puppets. The foreground of the stage, where Matilda and Mrs. Phelps sit, is darkened, and the background lit by a great spotlight. Within this spotlight, we see the enormous exaggerated silhouettes of the escapologist and acrobat performing their aerodynamic feat. The effect of using shadows reinforces the imaginative nature of this story – these are broadly-sketched, numinous ghosts, conjured up in the mind of a five-year-old, rather than real flesh-and-blood people. That the shadows are placed literally above the heads of Matilda and Mrs. Phelps also has a cartoon-like effect, resembling a sort of thought bubble that one might see in a comic strip. The stunt goes well until the last moment, when the escapologist's grip slips, and sends his wife tumbling to the ground. The visual representation of this moment is striking: the woman's shapely shadow is frozen in a spread-eagle position, her fall represented by a series of spiraling circles drawn around her, and punctuated by music. She is badly injured and survives only long enough to give

birth to a baby girl. This child is raised in her father's house by her cruel aunt because the escapologist is so paralyzed by his overwhelming grief for his dead wife that he neglects his daughter. She is roundly abused and tormented by her aunt, until she finally breaks down and cries in her bedroom one night. At this point, fiction and reality merge. Matilda steps into her fantasy, playing the role of the oppressed daughter. As she sobs violently, crumpled on her bed, the music swells and suddenly the escapologist (her father, finally awakened to his daughter's distress by her piercing cries) breaks down her bedroom door, and sweeps her up in his arms. Holding her to his chest, as she sobs into his shoulder, he sweeps her around in a soothing waltz, singing a thoroughly moving song called "I'm Here," in which he begs his daughter to forgive him for neglecting her:

Please don't cry.  
 Dry your eyes.  
 Wipe away your tears, little girl.  
 Forgive me.  
 I didn't mean to desert you.  
 Don't cry, little girl.  
 Nothing can hurt you.  
 You've nothing to fear.  
 I'm here.

He vows to protect his daughter and avenge himself on his sister-in-law. He rushes out to fulfill his promise, but is never heard from again. It is implied (and later confirmed) that the aunt murdered him.

One can see obvious parallels between Matilda's life and that of the poor child in her story. We can also see familiar fairy tale threads running throughout – the wicked stepmother, the orphaned princess, the use of ingenuity to defeat the enemy, etc. Matilda's imagining of her father as someone who specializes in escape echoes her own need for a way out of a life that feels like a trap. Matilda uses books as a way to enter alternate realities, but also begins building her own preferred reality through her storytelling, as a means of coping with an otherwise joyless life. By imagining herself as the child of such special parents, Matilda eventually begins to believe it. She slowly gains the self-confidence to resist Miss Trunchbull, using her only weapon – her storytelling. She makes up tales to protect Nigel, the smallest boy in the school, from being punished by Miss Trunchbull. Later, after enduring physical exhaustion in an intense P.E. lesson, Matilda dares to speak out against Trunchbull's injustice and promptly becomes the target of her

vituperation. This is an important moment for Matilda because she directly, defiantly speaks the truth to Trunchbull, instead of using language more indirectly to create fictional narratives. When Trunchbull venomously turns her abuse onto Matilda, the child retreats into her mind, discovering a tranquil space that she describes (in a moving song entitled “Quiet”) as a

Quiet...  
 Like silence, but not really silent...  
 Just that still sort of quiet  
 Like the sound of a page being turned in a book,  
 Or a pause in a walk in the woods...  
 Like I've sailed into the eye of the storm

By likening this quiet space in her mind with “the sound of a page being turned in a book,” Matilda implies that this is the same part of her precocious mind that empowers her to tell stories. Here, it also becomes a protective space in which the “words [other people] are forming / cannot reach me anymore.” It is at this moment when Matilda is most conscious of her mind’s power that she suddenly discovers a new dimension to her mental faculties. Just as her imagined parents were miraculously blessed with a child at their moment of greatest despair, Matilda discovers telekinetic powers in the moment of her greatest victimization. By willing harm towards Trunchbull, she is able to tip over a pitcher of water containing a newt (put there by her mischievous friend Lavender) into Miss Trunchbull’s glass, and gives her enemy a nasty shock.

This is a turning point for both Matilda and Miss Honey. While they have sympathized with each other up to this point, they have been kept apart both by Matilda’s distrust of authority figures and Miss Honey’s paralyzing fear of Trunchbull. However, after Matilda’s bold public statement of defiance and demonstration of newfound powers, Miss Honey feels a new admiration for Matilda, who demonstrates bravery that Miss Honey, despite her older years, has never had. She invites the child to her home, a humble farm shack, where she finds pleasure in simple things like working in her flower garden, brewing tea, or sitting by the fireplace. There, Miss Honey sings her solo, called “Home,” in which she asserts her contentment despite her poverty. It suggests that she finds true refuge in her humble “home,” similar to Matilda’s finding a sense of home in her mind (illustrated in the song “Quiet”). Through Miss Honey’s narration, Matilda (and the audience) learns that she lives in such abject conditions because her aunt, who raised her, has bound her in a contract to pay back every penny that was spent during her childhood. Things begin to click when Miss Honey draws out the only memory of her parents

she has left, a gauzy white scarf, which we've seen before – the scarf given by the escapologist to his wife in Matilda's stories. We realize that the tales Matilda has been "making up" do, in fact, correspond to reality, but not as we expected. She has in effect been narrating *Miss Honey's* childhood, as if the suffering of two isolated girls created not only a sense of mutual understanding, but also of shared consciousness. Miss Honey's story somehow resides in Matilda's unconsciousness, which is prompted into conscious life by the terrorism of Trunchbull. The frightened crying little girl who was comforted by her father, we now learn, can be either Matilda or a young Jenny Honey, a dual identity which is reinforced by the appearance of the escapologist during Miss Honey's singing of "Home." The escapologist and Matilda together weave the chorus of the escapologist's earlier solo "I'm Here" throughout Miss Honey's song:

**The escapologist and Matilda:** (Don't cry...)

**Miss Honey:** And when it's cold and bleak,

(Please don't cry...)

I feel no fear.

Even in the fiercest storms,

(Please don't cry...)

I am warmed by this small and stubborn fire.

(Let me wipe away your tears...)

Even when outside it's freezing,

(Forgive me. I didn't want to desert you.)

I don't pay much heed.

(I know that I hurt you...)

I know that everything I need is in here.

It isn't much, but it is enough for me.

We now see Matilda and Miss Honey as clear foils to each other: they have very similar upbringings, but have responded to their childhood traumas in completely opposite ways. Miss Honey is frozen by fear and a sense of inadequacy, which renders her passive in the face of Trunchbull's abuse, while Matilda finds a way – usually through her mental powers – to build resistance and eventually open defiance against Trunchbull.

Matilda later uses these telekinetic powers as a way to turn Trunchbull's own terrorist tactics against her – by enacting psychological warfare. The child levitates a piece of chalk with her mind and writes out a message on the blackboard, as if she were the escapologist's ghost, demanding that Trunchbull give Miss Honey her rightful inheritance. Trunchbull utterly believes that she is being haunted (a sign of underlying guilt?) and runs in terror offstage. We later learn that she relinquishes all her rights to the Honey estate and is never seen again.

This final encounter with Trunchbull culminates in an unexpected role reversal. One might expect Miss Honey to become a mentor figure for Matilda. And to a certain extent, she is. In earlier scenes, she recognizes Matilda's genius, encourages her to keep reading, and even tries to move her up into a more advanced class. In other words, Miss Honey helps Matilda develop her mind. And it is this investment in Matilda's intellect, particularly her facility in language and appreciation of literary creation, that later allows Matilda to develop her psychic powers. It is a lovely reciprocal relationship. Miss Honey is partially responsible for nurturing in Matilda the very gifts that eventually allow Matilda to liberate Miss Honey from her lifelong nemesis. In the final scene, Matilda, in the aforementioned role reversal, becomes a sort of fairy godmother to Miss Honey's Cinderella. Like Cinderella's fairy godmother, Matilda uses her supernatural powers to channel the voice and will of Miss Honey's dead parent, and defeat Trunchbull. (In the Cinderella story, the fairy godmother channels the benevolent will of Cinderella's deceased mother, helping her endure her stepsisters' jealousy and win her prince. In this show, however, Matilda's telekinesis channels the will of her father, instead of mother, perhaps to better express his masculine protective role.) Indeed, if we read Matilda's narration of the escapologist's story as an act of creation, Matilda has – in a sense – been mothering (grandmothering?) Miss Honey all along.<sup>10</sup> We can see the seeds of her mothering in an earlier song, "Home." In that number, both the escapologist and Matilda join their voices to sing the interwoven chorus of "I'm Here," suggesting that Matilda can, like the escapologist, be read in a parenting role – as a sort of mother figure to Miss Honey. By imagining the escapologist's and his daughter's story, she brought them to life. In this song, she and the fatherly escapologist watch on protectively as Miss Honey asserts her ownership of her home. And, paradoxically, it is this very act of mothering that finally allows Matilda to, in the end, finally achieve her "natural" role of being just a child. When the Wormwoods flee from the Russian mafia (another episode enabled by Matilda's facility for language – she can communicate to the mob in Russian!), Matilda is adopted by Miss

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<sup>10</sup> The frequency with which women tell or hear stories from other women in this play is remarkable. Often, these are scenes in which women use storytelling to form a supportive, purely female, community, which otherwise could not exist. This final scene as well as Matilda's earlier story-telling session with Mrs. Phelps reminded me of Marina Warner's term for fairy tales (a genre which *Matilda* draws heavily from) as "old wives' tales." Like fairy tales, *Matilda's* "tale-spinners often figure as so many Scheherazades, using narrative to bring about a resolution of satisfaction and justice" (Warner 311). It strikes me now that it would be interesting to compare Matilda to *Jerusalem's* Rooster, who is another (albeit male) storyteller who gains power and creates communities through narration.

Honey. Order is restored as the older woman becomes a mother figure for the younger girl, and – it is implied – Matilda will finally be able to experience a normal childhood.

**William Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* (1589?)**  
**Director Dominic Cooke**  
**Olivier Theater**

Thursday, January 12

Today began with a bit of a disappointment for me. I (and a number of others) had been considering going to the *Doctor Who* Experience in Hammersmith, just a few tube stops away. I had even found discount fliers at the National Gallery! We had the morning off because we were only seeing an evening show, so I thought it'd be the perfect day to go indulge my inner Whovian. But when I called in, I found out that not only did they not accept the fliers, but didn't really offer student rates. That put it out of our price range and we ended up not going. Instead, after class, Katie invited six of us to hike up to Hampstead Heath for a picnic lunch. We'd heard the weather was to be good and decided to spend our time outdoors. The scenery there was beautiful, giving us a glimpse of the English countryside. There were sweeping fields of grass bounded by dense groves of trees. When the sun emerged from behind its cloudy veil, the play of light and shadow on the yellow grass of the heath was truly breathtaking. Around us, children played noisy games of tag, chased their dogs, and flew kites. Instead of sitting down on a lakeside bench for lunch, we decided to eat in the low-hanging branches of a tree near the pond. We shared our snacks, clambered over the tree limbs like children, played with the puppies that strayed our way, and snapped a few silly pictures. Though the air was quite brisk and refreshing, there was a chilly wind, and our photos show us wrapped up in coats, scarves, hats and mittens – sometimes huddled together for warmth. After lunch, we tried to visit Wentworth Place (now the Keats House and Museum) which was within walking distance; unfortunately, it was closed, but we managed to snap a few photos in the front lawn. Though we couldn't go inside, we spent a little while exploring the gardens. Though it is January, there was a fair amount of greenery and even a few early blossoms, enough to give a sense of the richness that might come with summer. In the quietude of the sunny day, we sat on a bench underneath some fruit trees where, I imagined, Keats himself may have sat with his pen and notebook, and, perhaps, heard the birdsong immortalized in his "Ode to a Nightingale."

Our only play of the day, Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, was notable for its modernized setting and innovative use of music. Both of these elements contributed to a pervasive sense of an urban nightmare, which effectively reflected the increasingly agitated mental state of nearly all the main characters. In fact, this play strikes me as a living illustration of Freud's concept of the uncanny, in which a sense of unease is created when one senses that something he perceives is simultaneously familiar and foreign. Ephesus, staged as a dodgy downtown city which has seen better days, provides an intimidating new setting for Antipholus of Syracuse to navigate on his quest to find his long-lost brother. Antipholus is baffled by the royal treatment he receives from complete strangers who approach him as if he were an old friend. This is, of course, because he is being mistaken for his twin Antipholus of Ephesus, who has established himself as a successful and sociable merchant in town. At first, Antipholus of Syracuse is put off by this surprisingly warm welcome, but once he experiences some of the accompanying material gain (a golden chain, a sumptuous dinner, the attentions of an attractive woman), we see him beginning to milk his lucky circumstances, buying into the absurdity of his situation and acting against reason. At Luciana's insistence that she is his wife, he asks himself "What, was I married to her in my dream? / Or sleep I now, and think I hear all this?" (2.2.184-5). His lines highlight the surrealism here; even though she treats him familiarly, intimately, his senses tell him he's never seen this woman in his life. But while his mind is befuddled, his body certainly is not. He is physically attracted to her and thus decides to stop resisting: "What error drives our eyes and ears amiss? / Until I know this sure uncertainty, / I'll entertain the offer'd fallacy" (2.2.186-88). He allows himself to be seduced by Luciana, portrayed as a delightfully ditzy bottle blonde, who lives with her sister Adriana in glamorous high rise a la Beverly Hills. In this production, Antipholus despite repeatedly asserting that he is not Luciana's husband, still ends up taking full advantage of a wedding bed and actually sleeps with her. In the text, his love for her is not actually consummated. I think the choice to stage this not only increases the sense of unbelievable bliss that Antipholus is experiencing, but also introduces a sense of absurdity. Did our protagonist really get away with impersonating his brother and succeed in cuckolding him? And in the intimate process of coupling with Antipholus, did Luciana truly not notice anything unusual about her supposed husband's love-making?



The setting highlights these absurd elements as both Antipholus's and Dromios trace and retrace their steps through the narrow streets of the city, but encounter unexpected results with every repetition. If Antipholus of Syracuse lives the dream, Antipholus of Ephesus – who has the bad luck of arriving home later (after all his acquaintances have done business with his brother) – is stuck in a nightmare of accusations, denial, betrayal, and unmerited punishment. As the two sets of brothers are mistaken for each other, Antipholus of Ephesus's nightmare slowly grows to encompass his brother in its chaos. The mayhem culminates in a frenetic chase scene, in which Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus are pursued by Dr. Pinch, a physician and apparently part-time exorcist, who has been enlisted by Luciana to cure her mad husband. The white-coated Dr. Pinch and his swarm of orderlies all armed with scalpels and syringes, evoke the image of a mad doctor hunting down his equally mad patients in an insane asylum. Adding to the confusion is the presence of the other Antipholus and Dromio also wandering the labyrinthine streets; we see the two pairs almost collide several times, but – of course – they always just miss seeing or bumping into each other. The staging, too, creates a sense of chaos; this was the only scene in which the stage rotated while the characters moved through the set, adding to our perception of unresolved cyclical movement and the characters' sense of an unstable and shifting world. The scene ends with Dr. Pinch living up to his name and successfully apprehending his victims. They're sedated by his orderlies and packed into an ambulance, hinting none too subtly at their compromised mental state.

A final component of the play that added to the sense of collective madness was the ingenious use of music. Between scene changes, a four-man band emerged from the urban crowds, to perform for us, like modern itinerant minstrels. They sang familiar pop classics, but instead of singing the expected lyrics, they sang in foreign languages (Italian, Spanish, one reviewer even claimed he heard Hungarian). The effect was immediate: I saw several people lean towards their neighbors and ask them to identify the song. By not singing the songs in English, the musicians turned these familiar songs into foreign objects, things only half-remembered. I – and (I'm sure) many of my fellow viewers – recognized the melodies instantaneously and even found ourselves humming along in an attempt to recall the lyrics and the song title. By simply changing the language, the band defamiliarized these popular songs just enough so that we could only respond instinctively to them (recognizing them instantly), but we could not use our reason

to identify them. In other words, we could not put language to them; we struggled to find the correct words to name the teasingly familiar tunes.<sup>11</sup> They created just enough cognitive dissonance to frustrate us, to tempt us with tunes that were just maddeningly out of reach, planting in us the disconcerting feeling of knowing yet simultaneously not knowing. And, I suspect, this is how the Antipholus and Dromio brothers felt, albeit on a much greater scale – their senses over-stimulated and their bodies reacting too quickly for their minds to keep up, so that all attempts at reasoning were frustrated. This music forced us to connect in a visceral, rather than rational, way to the confused protagonists and put us in a place where we could sympathize with the bewildered brothers.

**Joe Penhall's *Haunted Child* (2011)**  
**Director Jeremy Herrin**  
**Royal Court Theatre Downstairs**

Friday, January 13

Today, we finally fulfilled a goal that we'd been discussing for a while: four of us had a sumptuous dim sun lunch in Chinatown. In addition to the usual dim sun dishes, we also ordered rice dishes, congee and, of course, plenty of jasmine tea. Dong, the only member of our group fluent in Mandarin Chinese, helped us order and explained all the dishes as they rolled by in their carts. Everyone was very open to trying the dishes – even enjoying more exotic dishes like chicken feet and fried squid. Over a bowl of my favorite dessert, red bean soup, we shared the predictions of our fortune cookies and had a good laugh. All of us were utterly stuffed afterwards and decided to return to Camden markets in the afternoon and work off some calories by shopping around. After purchasing a few gifts, we had dinner in a local pub, and made our way to our evening show. At the Royal Court Theatre, there was a cheerful bustle of activity. Many of us packed the crowded gift shop because they offered many of the National Theater's play texts for more affordable prices. I picked up a couple of my favorites, including *Jerusalem* and *The Collaborators* as well as a collected works of Howard Brenton. As I waited in line to check out, I

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<sup>11</sup> One of the songs which I was able to identify (with Kieran's help) was the aptly titled Gary Jules hit, "Mad World." The chorus, which was sung in some foreign language, originally goes: "I find it kind of funny / I find it kind of sad. / The dreams in which I'm dying / are the best I've ever had. / I find it hard to tell you. / I find it hard to take. When people run in circles, it's a very very mad world." How perfectly do these lyrics reflect our protagonists' mentality?

witnessed Dr. Peck outstripping all of us in his purchases. He must have bought a suitcase worth of books!

The play itself, the dramatic *Haunted Child*, proved to be much less cheerful. One of its main themes, the need to find some sort of transcendental belief in our materialistic world, reminded me of *Dublin Carol*, Molière's *The Misanthrope* (which I saw last semester in Stratford, Ontario), and – most of all – of *13*. In the first two plays, a character who has lost faith in his world recedes into his own mind and isolates himself from what he perceives as a flawed society, a solution that – in both cases – ultimately fails. *Haunted Child* and *13* both try a different route, by seeking solutions in the external world, and by reaching out to others. In *13*, the disillusioned characters largely turn to the vaguely messianic figure of John or, more frequently, to technology as a means of connecting to an increasingly fragmented society. *Haunted Child* seems to offer a vision of what happens when one tries to find a happy medium between the two extremes (of utter isolation on the one hand, and plugging into a super-system to connect with everybody, on the other). Douglas, a discontent husband and father, attempts to find meaning in his life by joining a religious group, which supposedly began with similar discontents. When he suddenly comes home and reveals to his wife, Julie, what he has been doing, Douglas sounds like a dupe for taking up with crazy cult. The group forces him into such masochistic behaviors as consenting to have his teeth surgically removed without anesthetic and purging his body of toxins by drinking enormous quantities of salt-water, which forces him to vomit. But as irrational as these practices sound to us, they fit the view that many religions take of the human body – as a distracting, sometimes even evil, form whose fleshly desires for food, alcohol, or sex divert our attention from spiritual growth. We usually find such asceticism in the form of sexual abstinence or vegetarianism (which Douglas also seems coerced to practice), but not in such extremes. Because so much of current culture celebrates or caters to such carnal desires, Douglas feels he must keep his body pure in order to find any deeper meaning to his life. It seems like he is trying to create a utopia within his body in the hopes that such corporeal purity will help him find some external utopia. (These practices start to sound irrational to us when Douglas begins talking about abstract concepts like “cosmic energy” or mind control via “funny hats” – as Julie puts it.) Unfortunately, Douglas – as we suspect from the beginning – is being duped; he speaks of “tithes” that he must pay to his group, a term that sounds alarmingly

primitive, recalling the taxes that peasants were forced to pay to the Catholic church in medieval times. In the end, Douglas returns to his wife, his clothes torn and his face bruised, and begs to be taken back into the family. It is implied, then, that his religious group rejected him once they discovered he wouldn't be able to pay them, and the cult is revealed – like the Church of Scientology – to be as bankrupt of true faith as any profit-motivated corporation on Wall Street.

Tragic as Douglas's crisis of faith is, I actually sympathized more with the child, Thomas, than with his father. He is caught in the crossfire between his parents, who have polar opposite views on how to raise him. Julie, the (understandably) overprotective mother, tries to shelter Thomas from all bad news. In the beginning when Douglas has been missing for a few weeks, she tells her son that his father is simply on a business trip and will soon return. In reality, Douglas has been holed up in the attic (unbeknownst to his wife) and sneaks downstairs periodically to spy on Thomas while he's sleeping. Thomas, unfortunately, has glimpsed him once or twice. This fact, combined with his mother's falsehood, forces Thomas to create a narrative in his head to make sense of the contradictory facts; thus, he comes up with a tale in which his father has died in a car crash involving a bus and is now haunting him at night. On another occasion, Thomas sneaks out of his room during the night, only to hear his mother and his newly-returned father having sex in an adjacent room. Screams of pleasure echo from behind the closed door, but the child – who is ignorant of the sex act – reads this incoming sensory information negatively. He thinks that his father is beating his mother, and he allows us to see his fear in an equally frightful way – by lighting his face from underneath with a powerful flashlight, an image drawn from countless horror movies.

But if Julie's overprotective silence results in Thomas's misreading of his parents' signals, Douglas's more candid approach is equally as harmful. Douglas wants to treat Thomas as an adult, being completely honest with him to the point of narrating his uncertainty in the world around him, and even exposing his child to unfounded notions imposed on him by his cult. In one scene, Douglas tells his son that he (Thomas) is not only his son, but the reincarnation of Douglas's father, Thomas's deceased grandfather. This suggests that Thomas is actually Douglas's father, rather than his son. Thomas, understandably, is confused by this notion and so distraught that he breaks into tears at school. He is also witness to Douglas's frightening first attempt to purge his body with saltwater, and later, is almost forced to do it himself when

Douglas insists that he try it. Not understanding this idea of purgation, Thomas only seems to absorb the self-destructive aspects of the act; he may read into his father's behavior a (not untrue) desire for death. And this is reflected in Thomas's growing obsession with death, a theme that repeatedly emerges in his drawings and conversations with his mother. It is ironic that when Douglas is searching for a spiritual rebirth, all that his child can glean from his behavior is a desire for self-annihilation. For me, this issue of child-rearing was the most provocative part of the play. How can one be expected to raise healthy, well-adjusted children when one doesn't even know what oneself believes? Would Douglas and Julie have been better off adhering to some religion that they themselves didn't believe for the sake of giving Thomas some consistent belief system? Or will Thomas somehow be able to reconcile his parents' contradictory worldviews when he is older?

I think Thomas's name is an allusion to Thomas the Apostle, sometimes known as "Doubting Thomas" because he questioned the truth of Christ's resurrection. Our Thomas, too, seems confused by the multiple, often contradictory, stories circulating around him. He has much to be skeptical of. But just as Thomas the Apostle eventually found his faith in Christ, our Thomas seems to find some semblance of resolution in his unconditional love for his parents. After his final, surprisingly candid conversation with Julie, in which she admits that she doesn't have all the answers but cares deeply for Thomas, they share a warm embrace. They seem to have reached a point where they could conceivably carry on their lives without Douglas. But only moments later, a beaten-up Douglas barges in, begging for forgiveness; he kneels and locks his arms around Julie's legs, crying. Julie is frozen, uncertain what to do. It is Thomas, significantly, who shakes off his shock and steps forward to put a compassionate hand on his father's bowed head. It seems that Thomas, confused and frightened as he is, recognizes in his father a similarly frightened and desperate soul in need of comfort and companionship. And Thomas offers it with a simple gesture. He seems able to forgive and love, despite his mother's doubt.

**Alain Boublil's & Claude-Michel Schönberg's *Les Misérables* (1985) Saturday, January 14**  
**Inspired by the novel by Victor Hugo**  
**Directors Trevor Nunn and John Caird**  
**Queen's Theatre**

This morning, after our final class, we presented Dr. Peck with a thank-you gift. It was a nineteenth-century book of essays discussing scientific concepts as if they were fairy tales. Jess found it in a local bookstore. Given its lovely appearance – a green hardback with a gold-embossed cover, gilded pages, and authentic dedication, it was a real bargain. We all covertly chipped in a couple pounds to pay for the book. I also wanted to get a card for everyone to sign, and when I proposed it, Sara responded with the great idea that we could make one ourselves. So, Laurel volunteered to do an amazing sketch of the famous London landmarks & mascots of various shows we'd seen, and everyone signed our homemade card. (The card can be viewed on the online version of our syllabus.) Dr. Peck seemed surprised and delighted to receive it, and I commemorated the moment by covertly snapping a few photos.

Afterwards, Deb and I got lunch at a nearby fish-and-chips place. It was an authentically British experience. The portions were enormous; we each received an entire fillet of fried and breaded cod with a generous helping of chips, all served fresh and piping-hot, wrapped up in a paper cone. That evening, we were scheduled for the alumni reception, so everyone was excited to get dressed up. But I'd been lucky enough to snag a few matinee tickets for my all-time favorite musical, *Les Misérables*, playing at the Queen's Theater. So, after lunch, I slipped into my formal dress and took the tube up to the West End to meet Sara and Caitlin for our show. I am admittedly a *Les Misérables* fanatic and know every lyric by heart, so I had very high expectations. Some aspects were disappointing, but others met and even exceeded my expectations. Ramin Karimloo, who played our Jean Valjean, boasted a voice that was more than sufficient to meet the challenging range demanded by the role. To me, he was clearly a cut above every other vocalist on the stage. His handling of Valjean's well-known solos, "Who Am I?" and "Bring Him Home" were a joy to hear. Karimloo's performance and the slightly altered lyrics and orchestrations (which stemmed from changes made for the 2010 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert) led me to think about the ways in which this sung-through show uses its music to convey its characters' personalities.

One of the ways in which the nine or ten main characters of *Les Misérables* are “miserable” is that many of them face identity crises. And in the volatile climate of post-revolutionary France, the ways in which people choose to identify themselves can mean the difference between life and death. As these characters struggle to form coherent self-conceptions, we can hear their anguish in both the lyrics and musical leitmotifs that come to define them. *Les Misérables* is at its most ingenious when it recycles its own music, resurrecting familiar leitmotifs in different contexts, different keys, or for different characters so that one iconic melody, through repetition, comes to have multiple significations. One of the effects of this same-but-different repetition is that we can see how one character’s identity crisis becomes relevant, sometimes even mirrored, in other characters who are also struggling to define themselves.

I want to look, in particular, at the show’s two main protagonists. In the beginning, Jean Valjean has just been released from a twenty-year prison sentence for stealing a loaf of bread, a crime he committed to feed his sister’s starving children. Javert, the policeman who arrested him and his parole officer, fanatically enforces the letter of the law, believing in its divinity. To him, Valjean is, always was, and continues to be a criminal; he habitually identifies Valjean not by name, but by his prisoner number: 24601. Javert’s conception of identity – both his and everyone else’s – is rigid, unchanging, and essential. He believes that everyone is good or evil in God’s eyes, that this condition is fixed, and cannot be altered. At first, Valjean fulfills Javert’s expectations because his yellow ticket-of-leave, which he is required to have on his person, identifies him as a criminal – and thus, unemployable. Driven to desperation, Valjean takes advantage of an old bishop who has kindly offered him a free meal, and steals his silver. When he is captured by the police and brought back for sentencing, the bishop unexpectedly corroborates Valjean’s false story that the silver was a gift. Nonplussed, the policemen can do nothing but release Valjean. Afterwards, a stunned Valjean can only listen as the bishop expounds his motives: he “bought [Valjean’s] soul for God” and makes him swear to use the silver “to become an honest man.” This unasked-for act of kindness confounds Valjean; it provides such a sharp contrast to the hardscrabble, self-serving life he has become so inured to that it prompts him to make a deliberate and radical reformation of his life. In the show-stopping song “What Have I Done?” Valjean swears off his old criminal life, name and all, and vows to

become a new man. He successfully emerges eight years later as Monsieur Madeleine, the mayor of a city and a wealthy factory owner.

The distinctive melodies associated with this song are later reproduced almost exactly in Javert's final solo, "Javert's Suicide." Javert, who has infiltrated the (June Rebellion's) rebels' camp as a government spy, has been caught and held prisoner. Valjean, who is also at the barricade in disguise, is given charge of Javert's fate. When the two recognize each other as old nemeses, Javert resigns himself to death, believing that Valjean will act accordingly to the law (or the Old Law of revenge), and kill him for betraying the revolutionary cause. Instead, Valjean – re-enacting the bishop's mercy – frees Javert. Shocked, Javert reconsiders the rules on which he has built his life; he has always acted according to the letter of the law, and never once considered sparing someone out of compassion. He was prepared to die within this neat system he'd set up in his head. But Valjean, by acting against the law and, moreover, with no thought for his own benefit, befuddles Javert. Unlike Valjean, he cannot see an alternative way of living; his pride as a lawman will not allow him to exist in the "debt of the thief." Thus, Valjean's act causes such a rift in Javert's self-conception that he annihilates himself, committing suicide, rather than sacrificing his integrity to re-conceptualize his identity and values. Boubilil and Schönberg brought Valjean's and Javert's parallel moments of identity crisis into sharp focus by reprising the melody of Valjean's iconic "What Have I Done?" into "Javert's Suicide." For ease of comparison, I reproduce the two songs side-by-side:

**Valjean:** What have I done?  
Sweet Jesus, what have I done?  
Become a thief in the night,  
Become a dog on the run  
And have I fallen so far,  
And is the hour so late  
That nothing remains but the cry of my hate,  
The cries in the dark that nobody hears,  
Here where I stand at the turning of the years?

If there's another way to go  
I missed it twenty long years ago.  
My life was a war that could never be won.  
They gave me a number and murdered Valjean  
When they chained me and left me for dead  
Just for stealing a mouthful of bread.

Yet why did I allow that man  
To touch my soul and teach me love?

**Javert:** Who is this man?  
What sort of devil is he  
To have me caught in a trap  
And choose to let me go free?  
It was his hour at last  
to put a seal on my fate,  
wipe out the past & wash me clean off the slate!  
All it would take was a flick of his knife.  
Vengeance was his yet he gave me back my life!

Damned if I'll live in the debt of a thief!  
Damned if I'll yield at the end of the chase.  
I am the Law and the Law is not mocked.  
I'll spit his pity right back in his face.  
There is nothing on earth that we share.  
It is either Valjean or Javert!

How can I now allow this man  
To hold dominion over me?



He treated me like any other;  
 He gave me his trust.  
 He called me brother.  
 My life he claims for God above.  
 Can such things be?  
 For I had come to hate the world  
 This world that always hated me.

Take an eye for an eye!  
 Turn your heart into stone!  
 This is all I have lived for!  
 This is all I have known!

One word from him and I'd be back  
 Beneath the lash, upon the rack.  
 Instead he offers me my freedom  
 I feel my shame inside me like a knife.  
 He told me that I have a soul.  
 How does he know?  
 What spirit comes to move my life?  
 Is there another way to go?

I am reaching, but I fall  
 And the night is closing in  
 And I stare into the void  
 To the whirlpool of my sin  
 I'll escape now from the world  
 From the world of Jean Valjean  
 Jean Valjean is nothing now  
 Another story must begin!

[He tears up his yellow ticket-of-leave]

This desperate man whom I have hunted?  
 He gave me my life.  
 He gave me freedom.  
 I should have perished by his hand.  
 It was his right.  
 It was my right to die as well.  
 Instead I live...but live in hell.

And my thoughts fly apart  
 Can this man be believed?  
 Shall his sins be forgiven?  
 Shall his crimes be reprieved?

And must I now begin to doubt,  
 Who never doubted all these years?  
 My heart is stone and still it trembles  
 The world I have known is lost in shadow.  
 Is he from heaven or from hell?  
 And does he know  
 That granting me my life today  
 This man has killed me even so?

I am reaching, but I fall  
 And the stars are black and cold  
 As I stare into the void  
 Of a world that cannot hold  
 I'll escape now from the world  
 From the world of Jean Valjean.  
 There is nowhere I can turn  
 There is no way to go on....

[He throws himself into the swollen river]

One can see how closely the two songs echo each other; at times their lyrics are nearly identical. If one is familiar with “What Have I Done?,” one can easily chart Javert’s reasoning process and see how greatly it differs from Valjean’s. The first stanza is sung as a rapid, rhythmical recitative in a minor key, emphasizing both men’s frantic confusion and indignation. Both men display shock, but where Valjean’s thoughts are reflective and turned inward, Javert’s are focused outward – completely on Valjean’s incomprehensible actions. Unlike Javert, Valjean is able to articulate how low he has fallen; he calls himself a “dog” and a “thief.” In the second stanza, Valjean conceives of an alternate path, “another way to go,” even if he feels as if it’s too late to change. He is even able to distance himself enough from his current idea to entertain the idea that Jean Valjean is dead. Javert, on the other hand, cannot find another way to define

himself; he focuses on what he is (the Law) and what he is not (Valjean). He has built his entire self around being the opposite of the criminal Valjean and now cannot conceive that they might both share desirable qualities.

The third stanza, for me, is the most telling. It shows both men reacting to an act of mercy. Musically, it demonstrates this shift in thought by slowing down from the frenzied recitative and its melody is softened with the addition of legato strings; we also hear a modulation into a major key, indicating a more contemplative and productive mode of thought. Valjean thinks in spiritual terms – seeing the bishop’s gift as a kindness, one that “teach[es] me love.” He sees the potential for brotherhood and equality in the bishop’s act. Javert, on the other hand, sees Valjean’s mercy as a chaotic inversion of the correct order. Valjean’s act is not a kindness that has the potential bring two men into brotherhood, but rather a power play, which puts Valjean into a position of “dominion.” Javert speaks in legalese, insisting on his “rights” and unable to conceive of a world in which an individual might act without recourse to the law. Javert understands how to treat upstanding citizens who follow the law and criminals who act against the law, but someone who acts without reference to any law absolutely baffles him. For him, such a world that allows a topsy-turvy hierarchy is a “hell” that is “lost in shadow.” This sense of an unstable world is echoed in the orchestration with a flood of tremolo strings and trilling woodwinds. Most tellingly, this unstable realm is described as “the world of Jean Valjean,” which Javert cannot imagine existing in. Where Valjean thought of the bishop as a guardian “spirit” who has come to “move his life,” Javert can only characterize Valjean as a “devil.” Javert’s mention in the last stanza of “black and cold” stars is an allusion to his earlier solo, entitled “Stars,” in which he praises the stars as symbols of “order and light” which always “hold [their] course and [their] aim / And each in their season / returns and returns / and is always the same.” That these same stars are no longer visible to Javert is symbolic of his utter loss of faith.

Both men characterize the despair that accompanies the death of their respective identities with words about darkness and void. Musically, the final verse is set apart from the others with a substantial rest in which silence reigns; when the voices re-enter, they sound in a slow recitative and has reverted to the same minor key in which the song began. Ultimately, both men are reduced to “nothing” by these unexpected acts of mercy. Their uncertainty is illustrated

by a background of delicate tremolo strings and punctuated with eerily-echoing cymbals. But while Valjean's escape from this senseless new world consists only of a symbolic death, in which he annihilates his old identity to emerge as a reformed man, Javert's inflexible convictions will allow his only escape to be literal self-annihilation, suicide.

It is worthwhile to say a word about the ways in which the two songs' endings differ musically. Valjean's announcement of his rebirth into a new identity is accompanied by his tearing up of his yellow ticket-of-leave which marks him as a parolee; simultaneously, horns blast in time with Valjean's ripping movements and as the scraps of the scattered document flutter to the ground, the orchestra ends the song on an unresolved key, echoing Valjean's transitional state. But Javert's swan song ends quite differently. While it retains the dramatic minor key recitative, string tremolos, and horn blasts, it resolves quite decisively. Javert's howling final note, as he throws himself off the bridge into the river, is sustained and only fades as he falls to his death; when his voice has been silenced, the orchestra – led by a thunderous brass section – launches into a majestic rendition of Javert's anthem, "Stars," as if gloriously reiterating the philosophy that this fallen hero refused to compromise.

The identical structure of these two songs highlights just how differently the two enemies' minds function, and illustrates *Les Misérables*'s brilliant use of musical leitmotifs. This is by no means the only instance in which a recognizable melody is reworked for different purposes, but it is one of the most effective examples. There are times in which *Les Misérables* feels like a musical montage, caught in a perpetual self-referential loop, constantly cannibalizing and citing its own music, but that is part of its beauty. There were many moments in watching this production when I felt myself wondering where I'd heard a particular tune before, and my later identification of its source song illuminated interesting ways in which the composers drew parallels between various characters. The wealth of musical play is at the show's heart, and goes a long way in explaining why *Les Misérables* is the West End's longest-running musical.

Afterwards, the three of us rushed to the Covent Garden Hotel for our alumni reception. We crowded into a cozy room to mingle with University of Rochester alumni, admire everyone's lovely outfits, and enjoy hors d'oeuvre and wine. Dr. Don Chew and Dr. Peck each spoke about how much this annual London trip meant to them. Both speakers had nothing but praise for our

student group, and it was also a reminder to us about how incredibly privileged we are to have an opportunity to spend a winter in London, seeing shows and exploring the city.

**Ken Ludwig's *Crazy For You* (1992)**  
**Inspired by the musical *Girl Crazy* by George & Ira Gershwin**  
**Director Timothy Sheader**  
**Novello Theatre**

Appropriately, our final show of the trip celebrated the delightful folly of romantic love and theater, two concepts which – in this play – are inseparable. Like a number of our other plays (*Hamlet*, *The Collaborators*, *Comedy of Errors*, *13*), *Crazy for You* explores madness, but in a much lighter vein. The show's source, Gershwin's 1930 musical *Girl Crazy*, provides insight into the specific type of madness invoked in Ken Ludwig's rewriting – the madness of love. It helps that, as one reviewer says, “the plot, even for a musical, is bonkers.”<sup>12</sup> It follows the adventures of Bobby Child, the son of a banking mogul, who wants to break away from the lucrative family business and into the glitzy world of show business. After failing to impress impresario Bela Zangler in a disastrous audition, Bobby is sent by his overbearing mother to the aptly-named town of Deadrock, Nevada, to foreclose on a bankrupt theater. But things become complicated when Bobby instantly falls in love with the very girl who has most cause to hate him, the theater owner's daughter, Polly. To win her love, Bobby – in an odd moment – decides to impersonate Zangler and persuades Polly to revive her father's theater by putting on a spectacular new production. When the real Zangler arrives in Deadrock to pursue his mistress, chaos ensues: characters are mistaken for each other, couples break up, form anew, and sometimes make up. Interlaced throughout these romantic mini-dramas are a slew of songs and dances. These musical numbers, many of which expound on the theme of love, highlight Love's irrepressible force, which cannot be adequately expressed by either ordinary speech or movement, but only in spontaneous song and dance.

From the beginning, Bobby Child is prone to fantasy and romanticization. In one of his first scenes, he has just failed an audition and is forced to suffer through his mother's I-told-you-so reprimands. As she babbles on and on, Bobby retreats into his mind and fantasizes about

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/crazy-for-you-novello-london-6292729.html>

dancing with the glamorous showgirls from Zangler's latest production, *Follies*. The scene he stages in his mind not only feeds his fantasy, but helps him dismiss his mother's lecture, as is illustrated in the song's playful chorus:

I'm up among the stars  
 On earthly things I frown.  
 I'm throwing off the bars  
 that held me down.  
 I'll pay the piper  
 When times are riper.  
 Just now, I shan't  
 Because you see I'm dancing and  
 I can't be bothered now.

Gifted with an active imagination, Bobby breaks into song when he falls in love with Polly. Again, the scene takes place entirely in his head. Lying in the dust and nearly dying of thirst from his trek into the Nevada desert, Bobby awakens during a conversation between Polly and Lank, the owner of the local saloon. The moment he wakes up, we are drawn into his consciousness. At the exact instant he sees Polly and falls in love, all action onstage freezes, just as it does in Bobby's mind. For him, the sight of Polly overwhelms everything else, and the stillness around him heightens the effect of his song: "If I should suddenly start to sing / Or stand on my head or anything / Don't think that I've lost my senses / It's just that my happiness finally commences." He acknowledges the irrationality of love which makes men lose their senses, and celebrates this irrationality by inhabiting this mental space in which there is nothing else but the object of desire and the lover's praise of her. The absurdity of the situation is emphasized by the fact that Polly doesn't even notice Bobby; during the course of the entire song, her back is turned to the smitten Bobby and, oblivious of his presence, she converses with Lank. Bobby is not the only character to experience the madness of love. Polly, a spunky tomboy, is smitten by Bobby's impersonation of Zangler, and she later performs a seductive song in which she comes onto him. Her love-madness is not expressed in the same internalized way as Bobby's, but is highlighted by her serenading of the wrong man, Zangler himself, rather than Bobby. Her blissful condition of being in love drives her to act out of character; she is ostentatiously physical in her performance of "Embraceable You," demonstrably flaunting her young body, touching Zangler, kissing him, pinning him against the wall, even propositioning him ("let's glorify love"). Her smitten state, which she admittedly calls "tipsy" in her song, causes her to ignore the fact that

this is not her Bobby. In these early stages of love, both Bobby and Polly stage and enact their ideal scenes of love, focusing only on its most pleasurable elements.

But in the second act, we see the more damaging effects of this love-madness, although Ludwig never allows the tone to grow too serious or his scenes to become too realistic. Picking up on Polly's reference to "tipsy" love, we see both the fake and real Zanglers drink themselves to oblivion when spurned by their lovers. This sets the stage for "What Causes That?", which immediately became my favorite song from the show. Here, Bobby – still in his Zangler disguise – drunkenly blames Polly for his lost happiness. But hilarity ensues when the real Zangler appears, equally inebriated. Together they form mirror images of each other, a feature which is milked to hilarious effect. In their drunken states, each cannot recognize the other as another person, but instead imagines that he is literally speaking to a projected manifestation of himself. Their compromised mental states and similar troubles in love allow them access to a shared space in which their dialogue allows both men to reflect on their lost loves. This very funny song actually provides a platform for both men to search their souls for the cause of their unhappiness:

**Bobby:** When I'm away from her I start despairing.  
**Zangler:** You ought to know by now what causes that!  
 I'm growing balder from the hair I'm tearing.  
**Bobby:** You ought to know by now what causes that!  
 When she keeps on brushing you aside  
 Oh gosh, you're all at sea!  
 You go contemplating suicide --  
 It's much too much for me!  
 You're not so dumb that you don't know the answer.  
 Loving her is what causes that!

Their mutual conclusion that "loving her is what causes that" reinforces the folly of love, a force that can cause such suffering (to the point where the lovers consider committing suicide) and yet still cause lovers to desire the cause of their pain.

A play about putting on plays, *Crazy for You* isn't afraid to consciously cite and sometimes parody the conventions of theater. Itself a rewriting of *Girl Crazy*, the show shamelessly plunders songs from a host of Gershwin standards to create a madcap musical pastiche. Among the many musicals cited was, coincidentally, *Les Misérables*. The allusion occurs towards the end of the hilarious "Stiff Upper Lip," a number in which the Fodors, a British couple, advise the dejected company to keep calm and carry on. The song maintains a tongue-in-cheek tone, with such self-parodying lyrics as:

What makes every Englishman  
 A fighter through and through?  
 It isn't roast beef, or ale, or home, or mother  
 It's just a little thing they sing to one another

Stiff upper lip, stout fella  
 Carry on, old fluff  
 Chin up, keep muddling through

Stiff upper lip, stout fella  
 When the going's rough  
 Pip pip to old man trouble  
 And a toodly-oo too

In its original Broadway production, it was presumably American actors who performed the role of these British characters, and in this particular number, they would put on British accents and exaggerate British mannerisms. But in this production, the effect is even funnier because it's even more self-referential. Rather than Americans assuming British accents, here we have British actors playing Americans who then put on British mannerisms in this number. The song abounds with witty references to such English institutions as the Queen and teatime. It shows a distinctly distorted, American perspective of our transatlantic cousins. But this parody is heightened towards the end when the company lines up across the stage and marches in place; their unified steps are enhanced by the actors' tap shoes and the scene gains a rousing thunderous tempo as the music swells to a climax. Then an enormous flag is unfurled and waved over the heads of the entire ensemble, as they raise their hands in salute with the final beat of the song. This scene is borrowed from the anthemic number, "One Day More," which closes *Les Misérables*' first act, in which the French revolutionaries march off to war. In the final bars, a soldier stationed on a raised platform flies the revolutionaries' red flag over the upraised fists of the assembled company. In other versions of *Crazy For You* which I've seen, the flag is red, but our particular production chose to fly the British flag. If one catches the *Les Misérables* reference, it increases the comedic factor because, in a song about Americans mocking the British, we end with the equally clichéd stereotype of the British mocking the French. Thus, we see various ways in which *Crazy For You* incorporates themes of love-madness and satirizes itself by showing the distorted lens through which theater operates.

**Final Thoughts:**

Since this journal is as much a journey through my own mind as it is through the plays' (or Bonaventure's!), I would like to end with a brief reflection. I've seen twenty-six plays in the past few days! That number is mind-boggling to me. I cannot choose a single favorite, although there have been a number of truly unforgettable plays, namely *War Horse*, *Hamlet*, *Jerusalem*, *The Collaborators*, *Pitmen Painters*, *Noises Off*, and *Matilda*. I won't attempt to find any profound similarity between them; rather, I think the fact that they are so different – in genre, narrative structure, and aesthetics – speaks to the overall quality of theater in London and, of course, Dr. Peck's impeccable taste. I enjoyed myself immensely on this trip. But it wasn't just because of the shows. Part of its joy was the opportunity I had to meet so many warm and welcoming students. I was pleasantly surprised to find that so many were non-English majors. It made our class sessions that much more interesting; listening to people familiar with theatre certainly brought a new perspective to my play-going experience and made me consider aspects of theater that I'd never thought about before. This trip has proven to be one of those rare experiences which is as enjoyable and entertaining as it is educational. I don't think I'll ever have another two-and-a-half weeks where I have the privilege of doing nothing but seeing high quality shows, thinking about theater, and exploring London. I'd highly recommend it to any incoming students with the faintest interest in theater. I feel very lucky to have had the chance to participate in such a wonderful experience. Thank you, Dr. Peck and Ruth, for all you have done to organize this trip! Your knowledge, energy, and unwavering enthusiasm are truly remarkable, and helped to make my stay in London an amazing experience.