

# **JOURNAL FOR "THEATER IN ENGLAND"**

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## THE NATIVITY:.

At the end of the theater in England program, I perceived the entire trip as part of a unified and continuous psychological drama; one which began, serendipitously, with "The Nativity," and concluded (more or less) with "Copenhagen". Despite the many disparate approaches these plays took to the trials and idiosyncracies of man, the resounding motif was humanism. Even in something as non-secular as the birth of the Christian God was a vehicle for exploring the tragedy, the drama, the inconsistencies, and the sheer intrigue of man.

"The Nativity" was quite brilliant in how it infused a classic biblical drama with a tapestry of images from modern society. For instance, when we first entered, the ceiling was decorated with a fantastically complex arrangement of colanders and cheese graters. As another example, the three wise men were paraded around on camels made of dunlop tires. There were also angels who had street cones for halos, and perhaps most blatantly, God was toted around on a hydraulic forklift. Although I don't know the

set designers intent in doing this, I would like to propose one - an assertion of the power of myth in

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largely Godless culture.

This is not to say that our culture is not composed of self-fearing individuals, but rather that, as a whole, we believe ourselves to have little capacity for mythmaking. We know, for example, that consciousness is an emergent property of "an enchanted loom" of neurons. We know that the curvature of our left fingernail is determined by a collection of nucleic acids housed in small bags of plasma known as "cells", and that at the most fundamental level, the behavior of particles is based largely on randomness and chance events.

"The Nativity" seemed to combat this onslaught of reductionism and determinism by dicing up bits of modern culture and pumping them back into a classical creation myth. It was a 20<sup>th</sup> century attempt at the kind of mythic externalization that Donald Baker asks us to strive for. It appealed greatly to me, and, as far as I could tell, to everyone else in the audience. I had a sense of epiphany down in the pit as I realized that I actually was partaking in a kind of harvest feast with meaning. I knelt to behold Adam and Eve rising from earth to greet a wiry steel tree of life. I cleared away as God was paraded by. I squinted as God's spelunking headlamp beamed down to me. It reinstated a mode of mythic thinking and for a time extinguished what Jung referred to as "the malaise of modern man." I think it was tremendously successful in how it circumvented a debate that I (and probably 90% of the audience) fall victim to: How does one hold their own creation myths sacred when an existence based on chance and natural selection has such an affinity for modern minds aimed at logic, validity, and reductionist thought? The way it circumvented this was simply by saying rather blatantly "fuck it, here's both."

Besides its fusion of the modern with the biblical, the play was also brimming with crucifixion imagery. This seemed to strike a sensitive chord with me, and looking back, I see this as vital. It seems to be

in a way reinstating the importance of enduring crucifixion in life - not in a morbid or masochistic sense, but as a necessary strategy for growth, particularly in regard to modern youth. Speaking on behalf of 20<sup>th</sup> century youth, I can say that much of what in our minds is a tenuous popsicle-stick castle of morals, and an indeterminate haze where we repeatedly question and are frustrated by our lack of conviction and direction. The crucifixion is a more graphic version of the immensely valuable "wounding" referred to in the Iron John myth, and to a certain extent, the nativity was presented as a series of crucifixions. Three of the most prominent were:

- 1) Lucifer's initial descent into the crowd where he is carried around with his arms out in a kind of prostrated position  
Lucifer gave off a sensation similar to a rock'n roll star in this scene. He was carried by  
his "groupies" and put on display in front of the audience. In this way, we were implicated as part of a morally defective public. This of course, was also parodied, as the character of Lucifer was quite comic and almost endearing.~I think his function was almost to downplay the classical Christian notion of the invasion by the "evil other" and implicate man directly as the bearer of his own evils.
  
- 2) When Abel is butchered by Cain, he is tied to the sheep and dragged around as if being crucified. There is a considerable detail devoted to this. Cain enters an almost crazed state as he drags his brother around by his ankles. This was a frightening contrast to  
Abel's  
pastoral  
simplicity,  
and  
implicated the  
jealous as potential "crucifiers."
  
- 3) When Abraham is taking Isaac to be sacrificed, Isaac carries a large piece of wood in the manner of Christ bearing the cross. This provided almost a kind of justice as it accentuated the haunting depths of faith.

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In conclusion, I would like to focus on the use of the vertical plane in the production. This goes somewhat further on what I mentioned earlier about the set design. The fact that the audience was swarmed around the action put a particular emphasis on vertical mobility. More precisely, it gave a heightened sense of the "ascent/descent" drama that Northrup Frye argues. As a bit of a stretch, some have argued that the human consciousness arose from bipedalism - giving man a way of organizing thought and emotion into distinct vertical levels. Above and below spaces seemed to have very different functions in this play; for the most part, the above was the place of instruction and providence (Where God ruled justly and Herod ruled falsely), while the below was the place of feasting and retribution. Just a few examples: God is the most mobile Character, and beacons from atop his throne as well as coming down (in the instance of Noah) to meet his people. Herod, on the other hand begins atop as a false king, but is later destroyed by the angel of

death in mid feast.

## BATTLE ROYAL:

I must admit that I found "Battle Royal" pretty rough going after "The Nativity." Whereas the set of the nativity was communal and cozy, the set of "Battle Royal" was massive and imposing. Perhaps the massive set with its elevated central podium and four red hanging tapestries were meant to maintain the distant sense of "sanctity in history" (In the same way, that the awesome size of Westminster Abbey makes even the most miniscule morsel of faith roar!). The size of the stage was often used exactly to this end - to show how vast and unforgiving the kingdom was and how cruel its intrusions on Caroline were. The one scene in particular with Caroline outlining her grievances to Mariette accentuated the tragedy of her marriage - her existence seemed at that point to be a kind of psychological dungeon. This contrasted very well with her experiences in Italy with Bartolomeo which featured a kind of "substag " This was a smaller, elevated stage where she could dance and interact. It was a smaller, more containing, and more "organic"

contrast to the British kingdom and was more forgiving and tailored to Caroline.

The contrast of the two settings - Italy and England helped accentuate what I found to be a central aim of the play: a study of manic excesses and manic depression caused by displacement. In this way, it is not unlike the displacement of the four Athenians in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or Othello's estrangement in Venice. The manic theme was seen most obviously through George and Caroline. Caroline is depicted as highly manic and defiant with her tendency for tantrums and hysterics. (In fact, in the opening scene I thought she was being committed!). George's manic energies are seen largely through his profligacy - his lavishing of women, his pathetic and exotic attempts to maintain correspondence with Miss Fitzherbert, and his excessive drinking. Ultimately, these activities for both proved to be self destructive. Caroline loses her life and fails to be coronated, while George is legally defeated and loses his love. This is very much a play about finding "one's place." George's place is as cavalier badboy of the Royal Court, while Caroline's is as the "outspoken 18<sup>th</sup> century flower child of Italy." Perhaps the title of the play can be interpreted not so much as a royal battle between Prince and Princess, but as George and Caroline's respective battles with the "royal system Throughout the play, the kingdom is presented as cruel and dehumanizing. It is a kind of eerie force and malleable power whose use has necessary repercussions. There are several themes which illustrated this in the performance. First, there were several instances where George and Caroline would give an offstage wave and hear a roar of response from a crowd. Secondly, there were the whole series of fights where a passerby was asked "Kingite or Queenite?" and then were beaten by the opposing faction.

There were two motifs though which stood out above all the rest with this "battle of the roya ". These were the encroachment of the court during the birth of Caroline's daughter, and the sheer complexity

of the set movements. The birth of Caroline's daughter demonstrated powerfully the dehumanizing role of the court. After copulation, the stage darkened and the spectators begin stomping in toward the bower - the most private space possible. When they reached the bed, the lights fly on and there is a child who is whisked off between people in a kind of complex dance. At the conclusion of the scene, Caroline is left childless - the only thing the court has left her with are the pangs of motherhood and a desperate sense of "mother hunger." Although she never retrieves her child, the mother hunger is overcome quite touchingly by her

adoption of Billy, who she is free to love because of his lack of association with the court.

Finally, the stage was elevated almost to character status. The first time it moved, it gave the optical illusion that the entire audience was swivelling. It provided the sense of the insane clockwork of the court. It was a kind of puzzle that had to be solved (but couldn't be). It was a bureaucracy that one could (and did) get lost in. The most appropriate counterpart to the stage rotation was the courtroom drama, which turned into a mess where semantics dominated over justice and equivocation was the major defence strategy. It was almost a kind of grotesquerie when Caroline's defense team exposed the ignorance of the witnesses and George sought to annul his marriage by any loophole or creative rereading possible.

As a bit of criticism, one thing I had some issue with was the character of the Colonel. Though he was fiendish and convincing and he was devious throughout most of the trial, I felt that he exploded much too intensely as a fiend figure in the end. That entire slow motion sequence where he whispers to Caroline is so dramatic and unexpected that it draws the attention away from Caroline. His monologue was well delivered, and his point appropriate, but he seemed to be using sacrilege strictly for the purpose of intensity (i.e. when describing blood spilling from the crucified Christ).


## AN INSPECTOR CALLS:

"An Inspector Calls" begs the question: "An inspector of what?"...And two weeks after seeing it, I have ideas but no definitive answer. I think I can derive a tentative answer to this question by considering what Priestly was aiming at - a true act of deconstructionism in which he dismantles a postwar society and reveals its often hideous components. Priestly wants to see the threads that constitute the soiled fabric of Admass, the term he used for "the whole system of and increasing productivity, plus a rising standard of living, plus inflation, plus high pressure advertising and salesmanship... creation of the mass mind, the mass man."

Perhaps the most notable feature of the dialogue was the peculiar tone of the Inspector's interrogations, which alternated between inspection and moral sentencing. It lies in his insistence and relentlessness which enables him to literally splay open the aristocratic womb which juts from the ground defiantly. Perhaps he is an inspector of the guilt conscience. Perhaps he inspects the implications of the actions of many. Perhaps (and most likely), he inspects something quite different in each of the characters. Regardless of which, the intrusive nature of the term "inspect" is vital. "Inspect" impes a kind of violation, like inspecting a wound, or genitals, or the contents of a personal diary. Perhaps Priestly could not himself define what his inspector was, but rather used him as a means for a means to an end... dissecting the aristocracy.

Clearly, the director of this production cared a great deal about staging. From what I could gather, this performance is extremely bold and liberal in its interpretation of Priestly. Although I have never seen another production of this, I would guess that this one qualifies as one of the most haunting. The stage had a stark physicality to it, and being in the front row, one could actually feel the cold draft coming the stage and was moistened by the rain on stage. People in the front row (compliments of Professor Peck), even had to duck from the barrage of broken glass when the house collapsed. The stage had an eerie vitality. It knew itself. The curtain was at times resistant, and at others even mocking (when the whole curtain descends during Sheila and Gerald's argument).

The play opens with a trap door flinging open and several children seem to almost spew forth confusedly. They come from the bowels of the stage and contrast the collapse of the stage later on.. They seem to be almost the hellish counterpart to the budding roses of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" - they are an unwanted guilt conscience... a pestilence in the mind. There is something quite terrifying in the children's behavior on stage; they are confused and violent - they seem to almost deserve the war torn hell that they inhabit. When the one small boy jabs at the curtain in the beginning, he sets the precedent for the interrogation to come - peeling back the layers to reveal what is hideous. Remove facades to reveal what is true.



After we see the house on the stage, we hear the laughter from within. I became increasingly interested in the role of laughter throughout the play. Each of the characters had a distinct and terrifying laugh: Sheila Birling had a shrill bubbly laugh that was perfectly matched to her whimsical dismissal of the dead girl. Arthur and Gerald had large haughty laughs that would often break down into a triumphant and sinister rejoice. I distinctly remember Gerald's laughter after rationalizing his involvement and defiantly thrusting the house back onto its uprights. Eric's laugh was also perfectly delivered I could just imagine him joking with his rugby friends about his sexual conquests of the previous night. The simple fact that laughter was even possible in the barren hell was somewhat disgusting. In stark contrast to this, the inspector is almost the opposite of laughter, and his face never deviates from its wrinkled look of dis

What I found to be the most resounding message was this: sin is possible without hatred... so its really, damn important that one is aware of their tacit implication in the atrocities of the "Admass'. Like Milton's Satan, hell and sin are conditions of complexity carried within us. We alone choose our level of involvement, as we are also free to. rationalize the outcomes of our actions. Although the play is an editing psychological thriller, and almost demands a moralistic interpretation, I am having difficulty pinpointing one. Its not quite as simple as what the basic motions and collapses would suggest... in fact, it isn't simple at all....



## **VOLPONE:**

I had a very keen interest in "Volpone", Especially after some of my explorations of the grotesque. The opening scene was a perfect illustration of what Harpham referred to as "a comic gesture of revulsion and disbelief." The unctuous and knock-kneed Mosca buzzes in and pulls back the covers to reveal three grotesque figures: Nano, the dwarf, Castrone the eunuch, and Androgyno the hermaphrodite... three ~/ creatures that are either slighted by nature or some incongruous component of many things. I found it somewhat hard to exactly pinpoint the emotions I felt when seeing these grotesque mechanicals with their prosthetic phalli and animal -like shrieks, and their utterly raw masturbatory suggestions with various creams, custards and sexual potions spilling from their mouths at points. Surely fascination was a component, making me not too unlike the Venetians described as "fascinated by dead things, horrors, prisons, freaks, and malformations."

Though I was swamped by the sheer richness of the language at points, I interpreted this play, and this production in particular, as an exploration of excesses... perhaps the style of language itself could even be considered a manifestation of this excess. To see this, one must only consider the rapacious mentality of Volpone in the opening scene, where he layers on description and adoration to his gold in such a way that his sanity is questionable. I felt a strange sensation at the sheer richness and excess of the praise of gold:

Thou being the best of things and far transcending  
All style of joy, in children, parents, friends Or  
any other waking dream on earth.

From this point on, the play is one massive unfolding grotesquerie driven by avarice swelling in all directions, hideously (but admirably brilliantly) choreographed by Mosca. The whole legal situation is a kind of grotesquerie, and Mosca's antics, I think, truly stole the show. Guy Henry (Mosca) was almost frighteningly in character when he would graze across the stage in his vacillating trance, or even just stand before Volpone. I would be interested to know if Shakespeare's Iago was not derived largely from Jonson's Mosca - the kind of glorification of the talent for letting people's excesses consume them. Mosca never loses a beat throughout this whole ordeal - he is essentially unstoppable until unmasked by Volpone (More on this later). We see this mainly in the sheer plasticity in how he orchestrates the two different trials, where the variables are the same, but the desired outcomes vastly different. Whereas Iago plants the green monster in Othello, Mosca dabs each man with the fecal stained beast of avarice.


Being a play of the grotesque, there is a distinct focus on issues of masking and unmasking. I would like to focus on several of the themes that I noticed:

- 1) There is Mosca's painting of Volpone's face. When painted with the green lather, Volpone is playing his avaricious role as an invalid and an "acquire". He is grotesque as he is the epitome of greed and sloth, using the illusion of infirmity to achieve wealth.
- 2) The discovery of Volpone's plan by Bonario. In this instance, Bonario halts Volpone's attempts at raping Celia. It begins the downward spiral of artifice where Mosca will thrive. Volpone makes a fascinating (for me) lament which closes act II and adds a dramatic intensity to the severity of his unmasking:

"Fall on me, roof, and bury me in ruin  
 Become my grave, that wert my shelter. Oh! I am unmasked,  
 unspirited, undone, Betrayed to beggary and  
 infamy!

- 3) Volpone's staging of the "quack doctor" scene. This was a wonderfully comic scene which almost seemed to be a parody on the Othello handkerchief motif. Here, Volpone is under full disguise to woo Celia and perpetuates the theme of "acquisition". . . now extending to sexual acquisition.

As a contrast to the unmasking of his artifice, which he tries to overcome by even more contorted attempts at masking and role playing, Volpone undergoes a final unmasking - the moral unmasking where the rigors of classical drama are obeyed and the hope for an ordered and just world is offered. Volpone essentially names himself in front of the court with defiance and destroys the ongoing illusion. This act essentially halts the grotesque parody and renders Mosca powerless:

	<p>I  a</p>
<p>in Volpone, and this is my knave; This, his  own knave; this, avarice's fool This, a chimera  of wit, fool, and <b>knave</b>;</p>	

This short but powerful monologue, when merely written, cannot capture the emphatic assertion that Malcolm Storey's Volpone bellows out on stage. Following the first line, he spits most visibly, and MOST grotesquely in Mosca's face... at this moment there was almost a slowing of time which gave this scene an almost epiphanic quality. The repeated naming and the assertions of THIS, THIS, THIS set everything back in order.

## A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM:

This production was the most vivid and vital rendering of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" I have ever seen. I think most would have to admit that there was some kind of strange Bacchanal energy released in the course of the performance.. I noticed it especially at the end when the audience clapped in unison in a kind of massive Dionysian feast (I'm sure Nietzsche would have approved!). The theme was celebratory and joyous. There wasn't a single scene that failed to deliver passion, pleasure, or excitement. It reminded me that we are creatures of whim and there is immense pleasure in the sheer human-ness of being human.

I would like to start with the "Birth of Tragedy" exploration hinted at above and make a parallel between the Dionysian/Hellenistic impulses and the Wakefulness/Sleep motifs. This production brought to life the transitions in consciousness.. there were stretches of repression (such as in the Athenian court) followed by explosions of latent Dionysian impulses which would surface as instances of self indulgence. This was most noticeable in the scene when Philostrate and Peaseblossom "turn into" their fairy counterparts by tearing off each other's clothing Peaseblossom's tower of red hair seems to literally explode from her cap! Underlying this disrobing is the vital idea that the director wanted to portray the fairy court as the hedonistic (in its positive contexts strictly) and magical counterpart to the Athenian court firmly entrenched in the repressive Edwardian tradition These crucial opening scenes made the entire rest of the play have an extremely facile gaiety. The action became a harmless, but deeply meaningful psychological flight of fancy.

The program placed a tremendous stress on the nature of dreams, thus, it is impossible to ignore the directors attempt at constructing an elaborate "dreamscape" on stage. It was beautiful the way that classical notions (or, at least classical to me) of the stage were dissolved and made way for a convincing world of descending onto center stage, and flowers blooming to incite the shedding of layers of inhibition.

fairytale. The set, for example, was quite minimalist and provided a white background "tabula rasa where could vie different planes of consciousness for control, battle playfully, and intertwine. Also, there was significant use of the vertical plane (as in the nativity), which suggested the hierarchy of consciousness - I fascinated any time there is continually interesting and noticeable vertical motion... Oberon, for example, the stage - regal would descend from above suspended in the air and imposing in his black robe. Titania's bed was third and fourth acts as a air for most of the

layered and complex. Also, and what was jutting out from the stage floor, stretched argument, but I couldn't help but see

Just as "all the world's a stage", the phrase "all the mind's a stage." It was fluid landscape brimming with dormant

constant reminder that the dreamscape is the most interesting, there was the curious ladder which stood hanging apparently into nothing. Perhaps this gets sappy in its Freudian this scene as the directors statement on the layers of consciousness. This production seemed to assert the most charming connotation of the

beautiful to see how each of our minds is such an easily molded and dormant dreamers, silenced voices, conduits leading nowhere, spirit forces

Scap

I would like to make a bit of leap (though it is in keeping with the tradition that credits Shakespeare as the progenitor of all aspects of modern thought.). I would like to assert that Shakespeare is almost a kind of cognitive theorist in this play. There is a continual weighing of the forces of "mind" vs. "eye" just as there is a contrast between the "eyes" and the "nose" in "King Lear." Shakespeare seems to realize that the brain simply perceives *what it does* and is only vaguely causally related to the sensory faculties. That is to say, it is only a physiological convenience that we have a screen (retina) so intimately fused with our brains: dreams, according to the brain, are not idle thoughts, but whole realities that are awoken into. This relationship is first suggested when Hermia implores her father to let her marry Lysander:

Herm. I would my father looked but with my eyes.

Thes. Rather, your eyes must with his judgment look.

I

This is the kind of logical inconsistency that the drama springs from. From here, there are countless instances where eyes are poisoned, minds are changed, hearts are altered, and fantasies are turned inside out.

**SPEND SPEND SPEND:**

Although I truly enjoyed this musical, I couldn't help but be haunted by a few of its underlying themes. Perhaps its wouldn't be best o term them as "themes,". but rather defeatist kinds of philosophies. I found most of the musical quite touch ng - the formulaic progression was used wonderfully. We begin with the naive "Ice Cream Girl" who tends to her duties at home and explore her passionate sensibilities as she discovers a curious "Sexual Happen'ng." We then see her crescendo gradually into a surreal and quite painful reminisce on the "scars of lov ." After this, the avarice/profligacy theme is worked in and we come to the emotional powerhouse of act III - the questioning of "Who's Gonna Love Me?" after the death of Viv's husband. Finally, we taper çff with attempts to reclaim the past and end with a series of remembrances. From this perspective, I was touched by the development of the Cinderella *motifs* throughout the performance. However, I don't know if I would be ready to call this a Cinderella *story*. Although Viv's ability to recover frorr loss is impressive, I didn't really see a conscious effort on her part to forge a better life; the choices she made were always self desctructive, even if well reasoned. Its not as if Cinderella must be half entreprenou - and half deity, but the moral progression should stem from the capacity of the individual to overcome adversity through a certain kind of diligence and moral chastity.

The main reason, though, tha I am hesitant to describe this as a Cinderella tale is because of the much discussed element of social det rminism that I was disturbingly aware of. I'm sure it wasn't a major intent of the performance, but one of he resounding messages seemed to be that one will always suffer the consequences of the social caste th y are born into. Viv's father is presented in the \_beginning as a belligerent, emotionally abusive drun d and as the musical unfolds, we see Viv reenact each of these destinies. First, she falls into repeate bouts of alcoholism, and later her relationship with Keith becomes increasingly cruel and complex. The e seems to be no way of extricating herself from this vortex of profligacy and tragedy - she continue mutilating herself until her weapons are removed. Although Viv has attained much material wealth, she is possessed by possession and simply acts out the patterns of an emotionally abused individual with greater extravagance. She is somewhat like Fitzgerald's Gatsby in this

ary for self destruction. Though the ability of wealth to exile and arforth episode (where they seem to be weeds in the terrain of upper shment from their comfortable niche in the mining town, all of their g. I don't know that I would call this " a classic morality tale" as tale seems to imply that a person is victimized by external forces their ways, and has a kind of homecoming - a

V respect, where wealth is simply artil isolate, return to the constancy is illustrated powerfully in the middle class England), or in their ban tragedy seems to be of their own doi suggested in the program. A moralit (which we have), realizes the errors of



of simple living. A morality tale implies a yearning for home and follows the prodigal son parable where a deep

decision for change comes from within.



With Viv, homecoming is a kind of ex-post facto emotion - an ultranostalgic return to the past initiated not by a

desire for change, but the utter tragedy of loss.

## ART

"Art", I believe, was the supreme example of a play which I have come to call an "interrogation play." Others which I would include in this group are "An Inspector Calls", "Closer", "The Lady in the Van", and "Copenhagen". All are plays where interrogation is used as the primary strategy for deconstruction whether it is deconstruction of a moral system, a cluster of friendships, or a belief system. Here of course it is friendships which are dissected in parallel with some vague notion of truth regarding the validity and worth of modern art. The white canvass of "the Atrioss!!" becomes the space where the friendships are decomposed and turned into a work of art: like a fugue of interpersonal complexity that gathers momentum until the dissonances between the lines becomes unbearable. The task becomes to maintain clarity and avoid dissonances, which brings up the question if the truth should be sacrificed as a concession to minimizing complexity.

Serge seems to understand this when he notes, appropriately, that "the Atrioss" has no frame. This seems to be a central theme of much of modern art: framelessness. I remember seeing an exhibit at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh where the art consisted of standing in a dark room while a series of lights flickered in no particular order. You were then asked to go to another room and stare at a white canvas for thirty minutes. Whatever thoughts and fleeting glimpses flashed through your mind was the work of art. In exactly this same way, the white canvass in "Art" is not so much art itself, but an occasion for art.

Though this is a bit of a stretch, this idea is not too unlike the probing humanistic theme tackled in "Copenhagen." Just as science rekindled humanism by placing man in the middle of a domain spanning from the subatomic to the cosmic, art has made a similar motion by placing subjective experience at the forefront. The aesthetic experience is not so much an appreciation of craft as it is a meditation on the work itself; even in it means using perplexity, confusion, or even revulsion as a starting point. Perhaps, in an even larger context, this reflects an increasing artistic interest in the element of time. To a large extent, all artists are slightly jealous of musicians in the liberty they have to sculpt with time. A lot of modern art tries to overcome the limitations of stasis.

*Interesting decision  
I wish you'd done more w:  
the 3 components in the  
interrogation.*

## THE LADY IN THE VAN:

Whereas "Art" focuses on deconstruction, "Lady in the Van" would probably be best termed "a-<sup>a</sup>-constructionist that is, the drama is carried largely by Alan Bennett's refusal to allow the Lady, or the van,

to have a true symbol status. In fact, much of the play is spent parodying the situation of her tenancy. Through Alan Bennett (rather, the two Alan Bennetts), we perceive what could be a spiritual journey as more of a baffling exercise in randomness. The events of Miss Shepard's stay seem to simply carry on by sheer momentum as Bennett remains in a state of intellectual indifference for most of the play. He never questions her stay, yet is not inviting. He manages the details of the funeral, yet remains largely untouched at the end. He even signs her petitions and reads her pleas to foreign sovereigns and the pope (among other individuals). It is this comic indifference which drives the play. Bennett opens his diary on which the play is based with a very appropriate quote by William Hazlitt:

"Good nature, or what is often considered as such, is the most selfish of all virtues: it is nine times out of ten mere indolence of disposition."

I wouldn't call Alan Bennett selfish, but hey' certainly embodies this "indolence of disposition." He is a kind of modern icon, like a Woody Allen who life just seems to "happen to"; a man with a magnetic intelligence that busies itself with sustenance and who seems to parody every major social institution just by his existence. think that the use of the two Alan Bennetts in enhancing the comic interplay of the "indolence." These two ultracynics dissect and debate a situation to death until everything is a kind of pointless gesture signifying nothing. Of course, much of the comedy arises in how incongruous Alan Bennett is with the Lady. Just as he is in mid-analysis, the Lady rolls onto stage punting herself around with her two canes and a wheelchair and baffles Bennett.

Of course, I'm not saying that this is a play about nothing; merely that a huge part of its intrigue is derived from Alan Bennett's cynicism - he provides the intellectual energy in a kind of "Woody Allen plus Oscar Wilde" character. Despite the comical power that Alan Bennett introduces, his cynicism is also used to enhance a distinct and urgent social motif. To see this, one must only consider the strange phenomenon that the lady represents:

"What made the social set up funny was the disparity between the style in which the new arrivals found themselves able to live and their progressive opinions.. There was a gap between our social positions and our obligations. It was in this gap that Miss Shepard (in her van) was able to live.

send

Miss Shepard is therefore a kind of mascot of the young cognescenti -journalists, playwrights, and cavalier young entrepreneurs among other. She is a kind of social physician that makes house calls up and down the street and is able to sustain herself perfectly in the environment that Alan Bennett provides - a haven for intellectual frustration and a defunct sense of obligation.

## HONK:

I found "Honk" to be quite touching. In fact, I think it had the most powerful and innocent sense of "classical yearning" of all the productions we saw. The presence of the children in the audience and the youthful energy transported me back to a kind of infantile receptiveness and eagerness (like the prelude in Cocteau's "Beauty and the Beast" imploring one to return to those four magic words). For some reason, the production reminded me of a biography series I used to read when I was little: "The Value Books." The Value Books were a series of twenty or so short books where the biography of famous individuals were used to illustrate a moral quality. The individual always had a fictitious companion and the adventures of these two were wonderfully illustrated in an exaggerated caricature style. The Value corresponding with this production would have to be entitled "individuality." One of the truly charming moments expressing this individuality were the Ugly Duckling's bursting from his egg and bellowing a "Honk!" in contrast to his conformist brothers and sisters. Another was when each of the ducklings presents their small shrill "Quack" and the Ugly Duckling gives us another "Honk!" I think to a large extent, this musical was a "coping myth"; a model for perseverance in the face of ridicule and estrangement during a coming of age.

"Honk" was also to some extent the warm and sentimental counterpart to "Spend Spend Spend." It is the positive and uplifting retort to social determinism, supporting the romantic idea that we are each equipped with a unique call at birth. It was a kind of beautiful childish epiphany that I experienced at the conclusion of the musical: life is not so much about finding a place where one's call is "valid", but more about discovering that the uniqueness of one's call is itself the purpose. That is to say, journey, in this musical, functions to make one realize the importance of continual journeying.

The most logical way to analyze the performance is perhaps in terms of the nature of the distinct journeys. The two most prominent journeys were of course the ugly duckling's and his mother's. Although the Duckling's journey was used as the generalized one and was the focus of the narrative, the mother's was important in that it provided a kind of social well-roundedness to the story. The mother introduced some genuine feminist concerns as she was a model of female empowerment. This was clearly illustrated in the growing number of stickers collected on her suitcase. She was a kind of "woman on the move" figure,

leaving her children and lugging her possessions around. Of course, as the counterpart to this was the domestication of the father, forced to cope without a mother figure in the household. The mother makes a kind of full circle in the end; she has come a long way from her original state where she had never seen past

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a certain tree in the pond.

One of the main things the Ugly Duckling accomplishes on his journey was the dissolution of absolutes. The journey, I think, can be thought of as an exercise in categorization; when the journey first begins, the U.D. craves categorization, as he is a kind of meaningless and grotesque hybrid unless he is

named. To everyone he meets along his journey, he essentially asserts: "Please... call me a duckling!" One of the vital parts leading to the transition though is when he meets the two aristocratic felines. His first reaction is hesitance ("Oh No! You're a Cat!"), but then we are given a rather heavy dosage of indoctrination when we see how breeding and nurturing has molded them into "perfect British ladies." This helps to dissolve the U.D.'s absoluteness in categorization and makes an easily digested comment on the "nature v. nurture" problem.

I was interested to see how the ending was handled. At first, I was a little uneasy at the Duckling's return to the "home pond", but I came to rather like it after thinking about it more. I had at first had issue because this was a very "non-Iron John" like ending. In a good inculcation myth, we are supposed to have a painful separation from the mother marked by a wound. Later, however, I realized that the intent of the musical was not meant to be so sweeping. This is a musical that celebrates childhood, not rejects childhood as time of unproductivity which must be overcome. The Ugly Duckling provides a model for coping within one's current situation - where continued striving is rewarded with acceptance and a self empowerment to realize the importance of one's individuality.

## CLOSER

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I was completely taken in by the performance of "Closer." I found myself in a kind of emotionally numbed state after the performance... to the point where I was absolutely baffled that this play has won the Evening Standard Award for Best Comedy. This play so violently and cruelly exposes what have become the kind of "tacit tenets" of modern dating. Modern relationships have dissolved from ritual and friendly banter to the point where they are exercises in cruelty and role playing; not role playing in a positive aspect, but in the most affected and damaging way. I saw this role playing evidenced most clearly in the kind of awkward pauses that occurred between each character's delivery of their lines.... I remember a few people objected to this, and even went so far as to call it bad acting, but I saw it as a highly intentional device to show the kind of posturing that much dialogue has turned into. The first comparison that comes to mind is with "Eyes Wide Shut," which employed a similar device in the beginning to accentuate melodrama of sexual role playing in social contexts. In "Closer," the pauses are actually written in as italicized "Beats."

The other instance which made me see this play as an exploration of failed attempts at role playing was the entire internet scene. That scene was quite wonderful in showing how blatant and eager the human mind is when given a communicative medium where it can disguise itself. Though we haven't quite gotten to this point as a society, we could argue that methods of communication are becoming increasingly "raw" and allow little for symbolism... words aren't so much "pegs to hang ideas on", but vocal artillery... plastic elements of speech which can be orchestrated to have truly cruel outcomes. The internet mentality is one aspect of post structuralist methods of communication - it allows greater expression of voyeuristic and sociopathic tendencies. That is exactly the kind of post structural world that allows such a voyeuristic play to occur between these four budding sociopaths : Alice, Anne, Larry, and Dan. V2aerism seems to be the driving impulse of this performance... the very title "Closer" suggests a close inspection of something. As the drama unfolds, I don't think it is too much to propose that it is Alice who is the kind-offocal point that everyone draws "closer" to.

Dan is drawn closer through his desperation and continual emasculation and rebuff... I think that at a straight psycholoanalytical level, we can see that he is still suffering from the loss of his mother... and wants to draw closer to the metaphorical nipple and back into a state of weaning. Larry is drawn closer to Alice's and Anne's crotch; there is even that one scene where he stares at Alice's crotch less than arms length away. To top that off, we even have the overhead camera which accentuates the kind of magnetic power it holds for Larry. This is in fitting with his occupation as a dermatologists which requires that he is detailed observer of the grotesque (dermatology has always had a kind of morbid literary allure for me there must be some element of pleasure a dermatologist feels in looking at malformed and defective skin). Anna is perhaps has the most redeeming qualities of any of the characters... not that she isn't guilty, but she seems to be the kind of "middle ball" of the Newton's cradle - the passive observer through whom all the energy is transmitted.. never moving herself, but feeling a sharp impulsive crack from both sides. She is a less psychotic counterpart to Larry ... an observer of the aesthetic of pain (like Larry, evidenced by her career). Finally, there is Alice, who I found to be



the most interesting character (and quite sensual). She employs "stripper -psychology" strategies into her orchestration of the socially and sexually dysfunctional situation. She aims the attention at herself and revels in the scrutiny taken to her body. Like an intoxicating charm, all are mysteriously brought to her - this is seen largely through the character of Larry, who inspects her "arsehole" for hours on end searching for the answers to life's questions.

I like to consider Alice an "architect of cruelty"... not that she is the most cruel, but that her strategies are so deceptively and competitively. The scene which best illustrates this is at the museum following Larry's birthday, where she stages the meeting between her and Anna. She has so masterfully organized this meeting that it seems to be almost a victory dance done on top of Anna. Perhaps the greatest scam of all is her very name! Her entire existence was a myth; a future carved from a past....

On final note, I found very interesting the role that interrogation has in this play. Interrogation is a form of voyeurism here, where on occasion the darkest and most hideous facet of the truth spews from. Like others in the class, I was somewhat fascinated by the psychology of cruelty demonstrated in this play, and the sheer force of interrogation played a major role.. The tone of questioning seemed to almost completely disregard the fact that there was a living face associated with what was being spoken to (as in internet communication).... One of the most evil instances of this is Larry's probing of Anna for the details of her affair with Dan:

(Larry imploring how Anna and Dan "fucked"):

Larry How?

Anna First he went down on me and then we fucked. Beat

Larry Who was where?

Anna (tough) I was on top and then he fucked me from behind

numerous shrewd  
insights. I find Alice to be the most  
interesting character too. Much  
could have more with the suicidal  
pathos of her life, but also her hotel  
scene with Dan toward the end  
where each fails the other but for  
different reasons.

## OTHELLO:

I found it somewhat difficult to stay engaged during the performance of "Othello" - I felt at times that the subtlety that was crafted into the lines of the play was delivered with high volume melodrama as opposed to fine changes in gesture. Perhaps it is largely a matter of personal taste in Shakespeare though. One argument I always get into with others regarding Shakespeare, for example, is on the performance of the "Oh Vengeance" soliloquy. Some actors bellow forth sheets of sound into an almost monstrous "OOOHHHH VENGEANCE!!!!", while I have always preferred a more probing and private delivery of the monologue. My fa orite to date was Ralph Feinnes's "Hamlet" on Broadway.

I don't want to dwell on this aspect of the performance though, since there is so much that I loved in ~-if""e of the first things that caught my eye was the staging of Iago's framing of Cassio on the night of Othello's return. It thought it was quite intriguing how the drunken revelry was staged as almost a kind of homoerotic ritual: As levels of sobriety levels went down, so did men's trousers. And as the men reveled, there was an increasing sexual element in their play, culminating in Montano's mock "phallic offertory" to Cassio. This moment was a kind of turning point in the drunken experience and Cassio responds with violence. I saw it as an excellent foreshadowing of the gradual breakdown of Othello by Iago.. quite a clever play within a play motif that was worked in. Whereas the monster planted in Othello is the green monster envy, the poison planted in Cassio is homoerotica. I'm not saying that Iago turned Cassio into a homosexual, but that the situation was framed, and sexual energies crescendoed until the tension of the scenario ended in an abrupt snap.

I liked also how some of the more encompassing themes of the play were death with, such as the theme of "circumstantial evidence". This is very much a play about circumstance, as we discussed in class, and the peculiar action that circumspection can take on the psyche. The most obvious example is of course the handkerchief - a trifle which is pulled taut under the strain of Iago's webmaking. I have always found it

7,/ particularly interesting how Othello describes the cloth completely differently in different scenarios. The handkerchief becomes a manifestation of Othello's thanatos - the desire for self strangulation over rational thinking and even-temper. In his first characterization of it, he gives a detailed monologue of it as something that ".. an Egyptian to my mother [gave]/ She was a charmer, and could almost read/ The thoughts of people .... if she lost it/ Or made a gift of it, my father's eye/ Should hold her loathed." Following this, there is even more mythmaking when Othello describes the "magic in the web of it."

Of course, this contrasts sharply with how he later refers to it as "an antique token/ My father gave my mother," a much more mundane description surely! It shows distinctly the kind of transformation that

Othello has undergone. In a sense, man craves irrationality and has a tendency for greatest psychological entropy - the error lies when we elaborate on this and seek rational models and evidence to explain irrational happenings. Othello is able to see the handkerchief in one instance as a magical token, and in another as a mere trifle. This is quite a nice counterpart to the philosophy of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" In that play, the aim is to give a construct where Dionysian energies can swell, grow, descend from other realms and spring from the ground; it is almost a parody of the rational in that it challenges any notion of emotional steadfastness. "Othello," on the other hand, challenges man's tendency for rationality and describes an existence where the brain is altered to calculate against itself.

## OROONOKO:

I found "Oroonoko" to be an emotional powerhouse. I was perhaps somewhat at a disadvantage having read the book, as I was expecting a subtle treatment of Oroonoko's "royal" nature. As was discussed in class, part of Oroonoko (the book's) value as a historical document lies in Aphra Behn's characteristic 17<sup>th</sup> century treatment of the subject matter. However, I absolutely loved the more "tribal" approach taken to the story. Perhaps the play would have better been titled Oroonoko's "Oroonoko", rather than Aphra Behn's "Oroonoko." I think the play truly excelled in this regard, in that it was a far more poetic retelling of the tale; it circumvents the sometimes strained efforts by Behn to characterize Oroonoko's plight in terms of Euro-Christian values of royalty, and returns the narrative to Oroonoko himself.

I found the opening fascinating in that it gave a kind of method of dramatic expression that westerners are often not familiar with. It was very much a play about "the oral tradition" of African expression - the highly poetic linguistic structure with a rich use of epithets and adjectives. It showed a world infused with drama, and accentuated the drama played out on the stage. Everything was an occasion for music and dance, beginning with Oroonoko's joking with his friends. Another place where I was comically overcome with this richness was with the song "the King's Cock", where the king's two servants defend their master's virility through hilarious antics and song. The two men were fantastic in the way they suggested massive "phallic swagger" and had "the cock" actually rear its head and speak to the audience. Of course, the rather biting irony comes when the mythic cock is snapped off rather easily by Imoinda.

All of this almost depressed me as well though... It forced me to reflect on how ours is not a world infused with this kind of "language passion" (unless you're an English major of course!) I saw this particularly with how worship was presented as a kind of freestyle poetry. There was, for example, the instances where Orombo would prostrate himself before the king and lavish him with praise. There was also the scene at Imoinda's wedding feast where their god was praised through song and dance. That scene also evoked a sense of a wonderful animistic world - a kind of spiritual counterpart to the atomic theory **4** Democritus ( I believe it was Democritus who coined the term "atom") where everything was too all for Eschew save the walnut which was too large.

I found it wonderful in the second act, after having endured many atrocities, the slaves began to slowly rekindle the tribal spirit through rhythm. It began with a frustrated drone like rhythm under a dull percussive "cough." Each person began to coordinate their activities and made even labor an occasion for expression. Even the one utterly broken man contributed a rhythmic clink with his chains. This sensation continued to synergize and accelerate until... "STOP!"... Ibn Sule expresses his stern disapproval from off stage. The tribal world comes to a collapse and a harsh sense of perspective sets back in. Sustenance is not enough... one must never be subordinate, no matter how grave the price of liberty.

This, of course, steers us toward the conclusion, which, although I found my eyes moistened, could have been done more effectively. In the text of "Oroonoko", the atrocities of slavery are disgustingly apparent with the slaying of the innocent Imoinda (even when bearing fruit in her womb), and the detailed mutilation of Oroonoko in the conclusion. I felt like some concessions were made in this staged production.. at the end, Imoinda's death seemed to be more a matter of poorly timed circumstance rather than tragic circumstances. Imoinda's slaying, followed by Trefry's entry immediately after, and then the accidental shooting of Oroonoko seemed to make the tragedy a kind of whim rather than a statement on human oppression.

## **A SERVANT TO TWO MASTERS:**

"A Servant to Two Masters" was an occasion of sheer theatrical enjoyment and pleasure. Of course, I realize I'm not in small company in saying this! Also, like everyone else, I was transfixed by the sheer talent of Jason Watkins as Truffaldino. His character struck at everyone's comic chord from so many angles. He was an overworked, underpaid, and misunderstood character that could re-interpret his way out of any situation. He was the perfect link between the dramas of Florindo and Beatrice. I think much of the humor was derived from his ability to keep the two plots distinct even up to the very final exchange of the final scene. Just as the two plots are ready to smash together, Truffaldino would bounce onto stage with his gymnastics and his antics. I found myself almost clenching my teeth with the precariousness of the situation and then felt this tension come rushing out as explosive laughter when Truffaldino would work his magic. Overall, most of the comical moments were derived from the facile movement between the two conflicting agendas. Among these scenes were: 1) the opening of the letter v. the eating of the bread, 2) the serving of the dinner to both Florindo and Beatrice, and 3) the airing of both Florindo's and Beatrice's clothes.

The opening of the letter in the beginning is the kind of comedic Pandora's box. Then as Truffaldino tries to cover his tracks, we have the conflicting tension of duty v. "creature comforts," where he must decide if he is to use the bread to seal the letter (of course, a pathetic solution to the dilemma anyway), or satisfy his hunger. This situation turns into a fifteen minute melodrama where we watch his starved face contort with pleasure as he softens the bread in his mouth and then looks quizzically at the letter (almost painfully). This conflict becomes a kind of self-perpetuating problem as he is ultimately reduced to dancing around the letter and strangling himself to prevent the bread from going down. Of course, the pride he takes in having fulfilled his duty is hilarious as well when he hands his master the "repaired letter."

We see this same kind of "creature comforts" comedy again when Truffaldino serves the meals to his two masters (the now legendary "spotted dick" scene). Again, poor Truffaldino is famished and must make a compromise between duty and satiety, but this time, the humor is in how he considers himself a kind of food martyr and tries "just a taste" of each meal. Of course, his self-denial turns into untradramatic indulgence as he is at points reduced to lapping up his food like a starving beast with bits of meat and sauce slobbering from his chin. The sheer improvisation in this scene is also wonderful - the audience involvement and comic passion in Truffaldino's gestures was supremely entertaining.

A similar kind of scene is when Truffaldino has to air out the trunks of both of his masters... now we have a dual Pandora's box where the confusion crescendoes. The audience watches as Truffaldino is oblivious to the utter mess he is making of the situation. Again, there is also humor in how Truffaldino is so

obliviously earnest in his desire to be helpful. It reminds me of the time when my grandmother scraped my mother's

brand new Teflon pans for hours to remove "that black grime" (the Teflon coating of course!).



## KING LEAR:

I shared the same reaction toward "King Lear" that many others did: I felt that for the most part, the performance did not add up to a coherent whole. Just as general criticism, I felt that the stage was almost too vast and became a problem for the actors trying to fill the space. It seemed to minimize the drama at times as opposed to achieving what was probably its intended aim - to make the audience quake as this massive kingdom buckles under betrayal, senility and tragedy. It seemed to attempt to achieve that sensational internationalism in Kenneth Branagh's film version of "Hamlet".

One thing I felt the play did excel in was in the performances of Lear's multiple accomplices, namely, the Fool and Edgar (when disguised as Poor Tom) and how they developed the vast concept of vision as it pertains to this play. "King Lear" is brimming with references to vision and smell - the more primal sense. There seems to be important differences between these two faculties: vision is often deceptive in its richness and has a distinct analytical component to it where one is subject to how variables are staged and framed in the mind's eye. Smell, though, is accomplished through a kind of mystical cavern and is intimately fused with a notion of self - a smell can take you outside yourself and seems to summon up an internal acting troupe to replay scripts that are condensed on top of one another in the mind's fabric. In this way, one can smell his way through life and use his nose as a kind of moral barometer; in a way, these are the true men: men who navigate by a kind of moral gradient like an animal migrating and keeping its bearing in the olfactory terrain: whole mountains and valleys of urine trails, rotted fruits, pine sprigs, and the scent of water shearing across rock...

We get the first suggestion at the "dilemma of they eyes" when Lear seeks to know himself:

Does any here know me? This is not Lear.  
Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his Eyes?

Whereas Lear's drama is that of decaying vision, Gloucester's is one of deceived vision - he is framed by Edmund, who gives him "indisputable" proof that Edgar has marked him for death. It is only with the loss of vision that Gloucester becomes a creature of smell; and although he stumbles and must be led, he is in many senses following the straighter path. This idea is stated quite nicely by the Fool in act II, when he addresses Kent in the stocks:

All that  
follow their Noses are led by their Eyes but  
Blind Men, and there's not a Nose among Twenty but  
can smell him that's Stinking.

There is beautiful equivocation in these lines. On the one hand, it can be read as "All men who walk straight follow their eyes, and all the blind can do is smell what rots." Taken in this way, the line is derogatory - a beckoning to open one's eyes in the face of the obvious. However, the line is also brilliantly foreshadowing in that it introduces the dominant theme of the later acts: following one's nose (as trite as this expression has become, the drama is deeply moving). With loss of vision, we are sometimes more capable of finding the true path.

## SONG AT TWILIGHT:

I found Noel

Coward's "Song at Twilight" to be a study on the importance of confession in autobiography and how issues of forgiveness work their way into confession. Like many of the other plays, it centered on the use of interrogation as a strategy for deconstruction, where the Hugo's rigid and unyielding facade is broken down by a kind of psychoanalytical "tag team" consisting of his wife Hilda and a former lover of his, Carlotta. Although not the most dominant character, Hugo is the center of the play. He is the thing to be analyzed and discovered. Thus, it is fitting that the play opens with images of Hugo flooding in from everywhere. It is immediately apparent that he is some kind of authority figure; he sits at center stage casually dipping his head to sample a book, while his wife has a subordinate position far to stage right. He is the generator of ideas, while she is the scribe (or so it appe\*

s); in fact, her position seems so subordinate in the beginning that few realized Hilda was his wife! The scene seems to almost shout "Hugo!"; there are boxes and piles of his autobiography scattered across the floor, and an almost regal looking portrait off to the side.

It was quite interesting to see how this "Hugocentricity" was dismantled over the course of the play. We soon see that he is continually on the defensive - in a kind of psychological stalemate that he must consistently maneuver his way out of. I realized fairly quickly that the stalemate was the silent anguish of closet homosexuality. It was as if he had to diffuse each of Hilda's attempts at trying to arouse some humanity in him with some witty cynicism or a clever reversal of her logic. There were several instances when Hugo's tactics were immensely cruel; for instance, when he asks Hilda how she can talk about compassion (or something along those lines) being a "full blooded German." I felt a kind of retributive satisfaction when Hugo is later left exposed and at Carlotta's mercy. The contrast between his own homosexuality and his mockery of Hilda's lesbian friend was hypocrisy at its most blatant. I think that Noel Coward gave an excellent portrayal of closet homosexuality - the kind of frustrated use of psychological energy was dead on. Also, the pattern of Hugo's abusiveness was well presented: each of his actions was defense or abuse, while at his core there was a dense nucleus of pain and loss.

For most of the first act, Hugo does an extremely efficient job at parrying from Carlotta's intrusions. His sharp repartees continually lay Carlotta back in her place, and seem to be merely the cynical spoken truths of a man acting his age. Carlotta's character was an amusing contrast to Hugo. In all the areas where age caused Hugo to deteriorate, Carlotta prospered to the point of excess. Vanessa Redgrave gives a fantastic portrayal of a modern and urbanized wife of Bath figure. She is a wealth of experiences and street smarts who speaks brusquely and affectedly about each of her former husbands. Her assertiveness was most evident when she would kiss one of her former wedding bands while nursing a cigarette and toss off a

whimsical "God rest his soul." Perhaps this is a stretch, but there seemed to be a scene where she demonstrates her "gap-toothedness" by pulling on her cheek and showing Hugo her fillings.

At the close of the first act though, Hugo's defense tactics are rendered useless - though he still tries to use his defunct powers of repression and denial later on. The only weapon that can penetrate Hugo is the stark truth of his homosexuality. When Carlotta exposes this, he experiences a spell of utter confusion. I really liked the opening of act two, where Corin Redgrave gives an honest representation of the psychologically exposed and vulnerable state; I tend to do the same two things that he did on stage. The first thing he did is kind of walk around in the dark and gnaw on his hand like an animal that must decide if it is to chew off its arm to extricate itself from a trap. The second thing he did is splash out a phrase or two on the piano from a Schubert impromptu... I think we are all familiar with the internal drama that goes on in times like these. A splash of thought, a flash of regret, and the utter depth of indecision and uncertainty.

When Hugo invites Carlotta back, we begin a kind of reconstruction; we start a process in which confession is forced to replace verbal self defence. In essence, we change the goal and style of Hugo's writing. Carlotta helps Hugo fill what was absent from his memoir - namely, a sense of confession. The second act is satisfying in that it provides hope in confession. I began to feel almost sorry for Hugo as he is grilled by Carlotta to expose the truth and is blackmailed. There is a point in the second act where Carlotta's tactics become too much - she seems to be seeking largely retribution even though the cosmopolitan air about her muffles her vindictiveness.

This is the perfect moment for Hilda's entry, and when she comes back, she provides a sense of balance and measure to the situation. She offers a kind of solution to the dilemma. She is the most impressive character morally, and rises far above her original concerns. For Carlotta, the dilemma is solved when she sees Hugo broken and is able to give up the power she holds over him - she seems to realize that he is giving her a part of his life back and not simply enacting revenge for a wrong committed against her in the past. For Hugo, the epiphany comes as a massive fall. When the letters are handed to him, his entire world seems to vortex inward as there seems to be a possibility for forgiveness and confession. The play ends on a touching note when Hugo continues crying after Hilda's entry and admits it; it seems to be a silent pulse of hope for Hugo's ability to experience intimacy.

## COPENHAGEN:

I found "Copenhagen" to be an absolute powerhouse. Although there were two dominant themes - the father/son relationship between Bohr and Heisenberg, and the romantic use of science in explaining human relationships- I will focus largely on the second one. Perhaps I am a partial critic as one who has always felt that until recently, science was painfully neglected in literature. Not science in the sense of science fiction or Michael Chrichton medical thrillers, but the sheer poetry and deep humanistic romanticism that underlies much of modern science ' scientific though provides powerful models of thought - a whole wealth of observations that parallel and help explain human self perception. The direction it seems to be going in is now beyond realism, deconstructionism, or even reductionism. It is a set of processes like the division of cells or natural selection that occur logically, thoughtlessly, and apparently "godlessly." Although difficult to stomach at first, the thought of a universe driven by sheer entropy is almost soothing. There is hope in this because it places man as the master of things again~in the exact center of a continuum that stretches from the subatomic to the cosmic. If science can stir tears, this is where it comes closest in Copenhagen:

*Bohr.* Not to exaggerate, but we turned the world inside out! Yes, listen, now it comes, now it comes... We put man back at the centre of the universe. Throughout history we keep finding ourselves displaced. We keep exiling ourselves to the periphery of things.... We're dwarfed again as physicists build the great new cathedrals for us to wonder at - the laws of classical mechanics that predate us from the beginning of eternity, that will survive us to eternity's end, that exist whether we exist or not. until we come to the beginning of the twentieth century, and we're suddenly forced to rise from our knees again.

This passage truly sends a jolt of inspiration up my spine.. it is that feeling encountered in literature when one just feels so utterly empowered by the implications of an action or an idea. In the science world, this passage is the science equivalent of Hector being chased by Achilles around the walls of Troy and passing the Trojan women doing the laundry - a wonderful scene where ones emotions are splayed out to fill the vastness of a kingdom and kept humble by the daily beauty of even the most mundane chores.

The simplest way I can summarize my praise for the play is to say that there is just so much beautiful science in it. At the core is uncertainty - the haunting fact that at the smallest scale, atomic events are full quirky, and random. Heisenberg's fiery personality seems deeply fused with this dogma (which, in the physics world has become a philosophy for many, and a way of life for some!). This is dealt with repeatedly in the skiing analogy: when one is rocketing down a slope there will often times be a point of decision, which Heisenberg summarizes succinctly as "turn left or right and live, or go straight and die." A random choice like a particle. How beautiful it is that decisions can be random... randomness packed into clusters of atoms and in physical systems almost seems to provide a substrate for free will.

The greatest thing about the play though, and what made it truly humanistic as opposed to an exercise in romantic scientific philosophy, was how there was a kind of constant retreat to intensely personal events. The one used predominantly was the tragic drowning of Christian, the Bohrs' eldest son. The drowning was used to place the scientific motifs in perspective: every time the plot would burrow into science and seem to become an intellectual exercise removed from humanity, the lights would dim, and the painful sequence of the child's death would be described. At some points it was used to illustrate the pointlessness and randomness of motion and physical law. At others though, it transcended the physical limits of the problems being argued. Terms like "random", "uncertain", and "complementarity" developed a deep and personal meaning.

Another of my favorite humanistic moments was Heisenberg's long soliloquy at the end of the second act, where he described how he was utterly debased and insignificant when travelling through postwar Germany to visit his family. This passage shows that even a mind as abstract and effusive as Heisenberg's is subject to the nostalgia and yearning for bearing - a "homeland":

For twenty cigarettes he let me live. And on I went. Three days and three nights. Past the weeping children, the lost and hungry children, drafted to fight, then abandoned by their commanders. Across my beloved homeland. My ruined and beloved homeland!

This monologue funnels the drama into an intensely private experience, where even this man who has forged a new way of thought, a new and strange way of interpreting one's significance, is tortured into a yearning for his homeland. The drama then moves out from this privacy and ends on a note of acceptance - as if to say "given this strange state of the world, what can we make of ourselves?" The final word is parsed between the three characters, and Heisenberg offers a kind of concluding uncertainty:

But in the meanwhile, in this most precious  
meanwhile, there it is. The trees in Faelled Park, Gammertingen  
and Biberach and Mindelheim. Our children and our children's  
children. Preserved, just possibly, by that one short moment in  
Copenhagen. By some event that will never quite be located or  
defined. By that final core of uncertainty at the heart of things.

### THREE DAYS OF RAIN:

"Three Days of Rain" was a wonderful performance by three very talented actors. I particularly related to the character of Walker, who was the prototype of the modern, intelligent, displaced youth; he was highly intelligent, but also highly accessible, unlike, say Alan Ber12tt or Werner Heisenberg in their respective roles. The driving emotion behind the play was sheer curiosity: what events could produce Walker? Where did the dysfunctional but loving sibling relationship arise from? What was the logic behind how the father's possessions were divided up? Most importantly, what is the missing history that clarifies what is meant by "Three Days of Rain?" The play presents a modern search for origin in a world that is complex; a world where human aspiration is often confusingly mixed with friendship, romance, and feelings of self worth.

The play begins somewhat confusingly by presenting the products of an event and gradually funnels inward and backward in time to a single gesture which the father calls "the beginning of error". Thus, at the end, we realize that what we saw in the beginning was the -result of error, and the father's allocation of his wealth was a kind of dying attempt to undo the error he had caused; the children, in turn, are the products of error. Greenberg was extremely fine in the way that he fused the artistry and romance themes, and in the way he creates a dynamic sense of past; it was wonderful to see Walker's decrepit lair revitalized in act II as a crisp setting with the architectural drafting table in the center. In this sense, the play was an exercise in preservation; it struck at the chord in everyone that is fascinated with the circumstances of their own genesis.

...~ I liked how the first act ended with Walker's burning of his father's diary as an attempt to avoid the past. Instead, it turns out to be a kind of offertory which dissolves much of the confusion of act one. The feeling this arouses is almost like the one suggested at the end of "Copenhagen": the idea of a "precious meanwhile" that lies "at the heart of things."

The one theme that somewhat eludes my analysis though is the distinct relationship between the father's (I forget his name) artistry, and his love life. The best reading I have of it is that it is simply part of the "existential amalgum" that both plagues and has motivated these individuals over two generations. Each of the "players" uses unique personal constructs for evaluating their own significance in an apparently godless world - a world where none of the individuals can piece together a coherent identity that incorporates consistent ideals or explains their origins. This is personified most obviously by Walker who is the antithesis of constancy, but also quite interestingly in Pip's father, who strives to be urbane and informed in order to combat his own insecurities. The web of insecurity, love, and jealousy which defined the one generation is strangely modified and inherited in the next; throughout the whole first act, "the house" stands as a testament to this dysfunction. Quite beautifully, in the second act, this house is

deconstructed into its respective parts; we end on a note of apprehension, where the bringing of the pencil to paper is the consummation of a relationship, the betrayal of a friend, and an artistic assertion. It is as if the house has the modern existential dilemma crafted into its infrastructure.