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ENG 252
12/29/06

Theatre in England Journal

Wicked

By Stephen Schwartz

12/29/06

As soon as you step onto the street where the musical *Wicked* is playing, you start to experience the stunning visual effects of the show. The sparkling lights are the first things that catch your eye. The large, neon green sign on the building casts a garish glow on everyone's face, literally turning each person green. Before audience members even enter the theater, they are exposed to the idea of green people; this makes it easier to sympathize with a non-traditional, green heroine. This effect is just the first in a long line of effects which help to create the visually stunning experience that is *Wicked*.

This "razzle dazzle" aspect begins with the lights outside and continues as you enter the lobby. On one side, a wall of green and pink t-shirts and souvenirs looms, while on the other side the bar sells neon green and pink drinks. I found it amazing that the show's visual effects begin before the actual show. This seemingly exaggerated use of glitz and glamour fits in with a major theme of the musical—the use of and conceptions surrounding appearances. This theme, a major one for fairy tales, is skillfully employed. Elphaba, also known as the "Wicked Witch of the West" is a green woman whose color foreshadows her eventual rebellion and expulsion from society, while Glinda, known as "Glinda the Good Witch," appears beautiful, nice, and popular, but in reality is shallow and cowardly. And the "Wizard of Oz," seemingly a kind old man, is in reality an evil, manipulative dictator.

This musical is set in the familiar "Land of Oz" in order to prove that things are hardly ever what they seem. According to this musical, hardly anything that Frank L. Baum wrote in *The Wizard of Oz* is accurate; in fact, Dorothy does not even make an appearance. The audience's preconceived notions of Oz are refuted when we find that The Wizard is actually a conniving man who only appears to be a kindly, grandfather-like figure. In reality, he is power-hungry and prejudiced against Animals, beings that look like animals but who speak and feel like humans. He tricks Elphaba into using her magical powers to hurt Animals. Elphaba responds to his trick by running away, declaring: "I'm sick of playing by someone else's rules." This occurs at the beginning of her moving ballad, "I'm defying gravity." As she rises into the sky for the first time on her bewitched broom, another visual effect comes into play. The lights go out on Elphaba; when they come back on she is near the ceiling of the stage, and her cloak appears to be flowing all the way down to the floor. This effect helps to paint Elphaba in the minds of the audience members as a huge, magical force; she is able to defy gravity, a force which by definition cannot be defied. It is mildly ironic that a musical that proclaims through its characters that appearances are unimportant relies so heavily upon appearances for effect.

This show also struck me as a kind of musical "Bildungsroman," in which the heroine comes of age by learning her own strengths and by learning what reality is really like. At the same time, it reminds me of the musical "Into the Woods," in which fairy tale happy endings are proven to be false and unrealistic and therefore less fulfilling than real life. From Glinda, Elphaba learns how to be feminine and "popular," and Glinda

learns from Elphaba that appearances are not as important as she first believed. At the end of the show, Elphaba completes her transformation into adulthood, as she leaves her childhood friend behind in order to enter a new land with her love Fiyero. She and Glinda both realize that in real life good and evil are not always easy to see or define, and consequently sing “I don’t know if I’ve been changed for the better; but I know that I’ve been changed for good.” Elphaba also learns that she is not as “unlimited” as she first believed; she and Fiyero, rather than making a grand exit by flying away, must leave Oz secretly, walking hand in hand on the ground. Neither Elphaba nor Glinda know what their futures hold, but each enters into her future with her eyes open, with a newfound awareness of reality.

Love Song

By John Kolvenbach

12/30/06

This play had a cinematic feel created by the incorporation of music as a kind of sound track, and also as violent interruptions to the dialogue. These dramatic interruptions, so loud that a few audience members covered their ears at first, could symbolize the dramatic emotional changes which the main character Beane undergoes. The difference in lighting also indicated the large difference between Beane’s life and his sister’s life. While Beane’s apartment has only one small lamp that is usually turned off, his sister’s apartment is brightly lit from all sides. These technical aspects lead us to ask the question: how do Beane’s life and his sister Joan’s life compare? At the beginning of the play, Beane appears to be schizophrenic and withdrawn, while Joan appears to be outgoing and successful. While there may at first seem to be a dramatic difference between Beane’s life and Joan’s life, we soon learn that Joan and Beane have one large thing in common: they are both incredibly depressed.

Beane deals with his depression by creating a fictitious lover named Molly. Joan creates imaginary scenarios with her husband; they pretend to be sick so that they can skip work, and then they pretend to smoke cigarettes and shoot heroine in order to loosen up. It seems as if both Beane and Joan are trying to escape their pasts, trying to escape lives they have only partially created. When Molly describes the house she burnt down, she is describing Joan’s house. Beane creates Molly as a kind of catalyst, someone who will get him to go out into the real world and burn down all of his boundaries and emotional baggage. However, once Beane finally realizes that he can stop looking at people through peepholes and can open doors, he also realizes that he must leave his hallucination behind. Molly admits, “I have certain strengths Beane; I’m not so good on the outside.” Beane must rely only on himself and not on his delusions in order to live life in the real world.

Obviously the name of this play indicates its major theme—love. Love is portrayed in many different forms; the love between Beane and Joan, the love between Beane and Molly, and the love between Joan and her husband Harry are all analyzed and questioned throughout the play. Beane’s love for Molly is at first very codependent because she has complete control over him. He holds his hands up even when she does not have a gun, saying that sometimes you can have someone at gunpoint without having a physical gun. Their relationship is much like a junkie to his drug of choice. This idea

of love as a drug also comes into play in the love between Joan and Harry. Joan and Harry must make believe that they are doing drugs in order to relax enough to come together as a couple. Love is also seen as a link between the public and private self; when Joan is spurned in love by a boy, she comforts herself by masturbating, a form of loving herself. Beane begins the show with only a dim shape of a private personality. By falling in love with Molly, he has been “created,” and has formed tastes and likes that he never had before. The turkey sandwich he eats with his sister is suddenly amazing, and he suddenly realizes that he wants to drink alcohol. At the end of the play, Beane opens his door and leaves Molly behind. By creating a catalyst in the form of Molly, Beane has created an interesting private self for himself, which gives him the ability to form a public self. The play does not give us all the answers; we do not know whether Beane will be successful in creating a public self. But it definitely leads us to believe that he is going to try.

Spice Drum Beat

By David Kramer and Taliep Petersen

12/30/06

Because of the repetitive nature and simple harmonic structure of folk music, it is sometimes hard for modern listeners to hear the emotions that the words portray in the musical language of the songs themselves. This phenomenon occurs in the play *Spice Drum Beat*. Traditional South African folk music is used to portray the history of the slave and spice trades within South Africa. At times it is mixed with rap music, as in the case of “Hot and Tot,” two silly rappers who rap about cruelty to their people while at the same time mugging and making faces for the audience’s amusement. This seems at first to be an inherent fault in this play; the historical content is serious, but for most of the play it is portrayed by the actors in an upbeat or funny way. Perhaps the point of this method is to make the audience feel at ease, but it seemed at first to alienate rather than draw in viewers. When sad emotion is portrayed, as in the case of the old weeping woman, it appears melodramatic and somehow out of place. It is very hard to become invested in a sad scene when all the scenes leading up to it are funny or happy.

Obviously the music is an important aspect of this play. Folk music is intertwined with pop or rap music, just as traditional dancing is mixed with a more Broadway-esque style. One could look at this in a positive way; the South African people have remained optimistic and flexible underneath this awful oppression, and have managed to adopt their culture to modern day. There is also an overhead screen used to show words of songs, but it seems to distract from the performance rather than to enhance it. Over all, the show appears to be more of a musical review rather than a play. The vignettes are not necessarily connected to the ones that come before or after them, which makes it hard to follow linearly. It is interesting however to consider the relationship of certain musical styles to culture; blues are intrinsically American, while the music heard in this show could be considered intrinsically South African. Simply by singing these songs the cast is continuing the South African tradition of expressing joy and sadness through music. This is a tradition in all parts of the world, and the one aspect which really connects with the audience.

Although some may consider the music in this play as a “Disney version” of South African music, I believe that the cast did their best to portray the culture of these songs through their performance. Perhaps the songs needed to be made into an easier version to stomach in order to be marketable on stage. Or if we take a more optimistic perspective, perhaps the performers were trying to portray the sheer unconquerable nature of the human spirit through joyful sounding songs.

Peter Pan
James Barrie
12/31/06

This was my first experience with the genre of pantomime, so I was not sure what to expect. I think that the original, traditional stage production of *Peter Pan* is considered a pantomime because Peter is played by a woman, and cross-dressing is a traditional convention of pantomime. One of the aspects in this production which relates back to the traditional cross-dressing aspect of pantomime in general is the scene in which Smee sings, “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” Smee proclaims that on the first day of Christmas his true love gave him a bra that was “made to hold three.” In order to demonstrate his point, he holds up an actual three-cupped bra. This play seems in particular to focus on perverting commonly held conceptions, a defining aspect of pantomimes. Smee has to hold up the three-cupped bra every time he sings about it, and often the actor holds it up and pretends to wear it, reinforcing the cross-dressing tradition.

The choice of music also helped to redefine the audience’s preconceived notions of *Peter Pan*. Instead of using the traditional score of the musical production of *Peter Pan*, we hear some parts of the original score mixed in with popular songs and rock songs. Often the cast even improvises during the traditional numbers (example: Captain Hook’s song in which Henry Winkler forgets words and makes up lyrics), which changes the expectations further. The cast improvises or seems to forget a sizeable amount of their lines. Although I appreciate these efforts at improvisational comedy, some are more successful than others. The actor who plays Smee seems to be a comedian or at least has good comic timing. His jokes and gags tend to get a larger audience response than Henry Winkler’s. I think this play is a good example of how uncontrolled improvisation can be taken too far and how it takes away from the humor of the play rather than adding to it. If the actors are laughing at their own mistakes and jokes but the audience is not, the dynamic seems wrong and the audience does not enjoy themselves as completely.

It also is a little disappointing how the original version of *Peter Pan* is not adhered to more strictly. There is plenty of humor in the original musical *Peter Pan*, humor that James Barry created to appeal directly to children. Much of this humor is lost in the pantomime production, because the script at times seems to appeal more to the adults in the audience than the children. Only adult audience members would recognize certain songs (ex: “Eye of the Tiger”) and only adult audience members would recognize Henry Winkler’s “The Fonz” act. This shows that a lot of the play is supposed to appeal to the adults’ sense of humor. Unfortunately because of the cast’s lack of commitment to their lines and songs, a lot of these references are lost or not are not given enough time to sink in, so even the adults miss a lot of the humor. So although the production overall addressed the requirements of a pantomime: cross-dressing and perversion of

preconceived societal notions, it would have been more successful if the cast had committed to their lines and had stayed more thoroughly in character.

The Lightning Play

By Charlotte Jones

1/1/07

This fascinating play deals with modern day issues and their relationship to ancient ideas of spiritualism and expression. The relationship between presence and absence of both people and things is explored as well. When the lights come up, the first two things we notice are the large, colorful carpet in the center of the floor and the huge TV on the wall. These “two huge elephants in the room” are made even more noticeable because the room is otherwise modernly designed and starkly bare. We soon learn that Harriet bought the carpet and Max bought the television. We also learn that these possessions very likely represent Max and Harriet’s two missing children, Freddie and Anna. Both Max and Harriet are trying to fill the inner voids created by losing their children and by basically losing their marriage. Max constantly scorns Harriet and Harriet constantly accuses Max. The brand new TV and the ancient prayer rug indicate the differences in their ways of dealing with grief. Harriet is searching for spiritual answers, while Max is searching for something more definite and scientific.

After much debating Harriet buys the rug even though she is not sure if she wants to keep it. Harriet is obsessed with possessions; every day she goes to the rug shop and looks at every single rug, even if she’s seen each of them before. Harriet’s quest for the perfect rug seems to be never-ending, and after many of her visits the owner of the shop tells her that she will never buy a rug. Harriet has sex with him on the rug that she consequently buys, adding to the sexual/spiritual history of the rug. This rug, a “prayer rug,” as the shop owner calls it, seems to symbolize happiness to Harriet. She tries to fill the void in herself with beautiful things, things she can love and that have a history of love. Harriet’s need to fill her life with material possessions mirrors her inner need to replace her dead son and the incredibly depressing lack of love in her life.

Max, Harriet’s husband, is also searching for something to fill the void he has within himself. The TV which does not seem to work is Max’s effort to fill this void. It is incredibly appropriate that he sees clips of his daughter Anna in danger, since the TV is a kind of replacement for Anna. Anna, Max and Harriet’s daughter, has a death wish and volunteers in the most dangerous parts of the world. Because she could not save her little brother from death by lightning, she spends her entire life either trying to save others or trying to die. This suggests an interesting parallel between Anna and her mother, since both of them attempt to commit suicide. We learn that Harriet tried to step in front of a moving bus, and we learn that Anna may be standing in front of tanks. Max plays a critical role between the two women in his life. He sarcastically rebukes his wife and scorns her daily activities, while he idolizes his daughter Anna. He may even have thought at one point of Anna as a kind of stand-in for his wife, since he seems attracted to Tabitha Morris because she reminds him of his daughter. We also learn that Anna started having sex with random men at the age of fourteen, a classic sign that she may have been abused as a child. And although there is no concrete evidence within the play to suggest that Max ever actually molests his daughter, as Harriet says about Max’s mental

unfaithfulness, “thinking about it is just as bad as doing it.” Max is a man who hides his pain beneath his sarcastic quips and humorous statements, and a man who makes his living by writing about the lives of others. Max can write about others lives but he cannot seem to write about his own.

The play is set on Halloween, a night when demons come out and when the dead can come to life. This idea of the dead coming to life is crucial to the play, since many of the characters have died an inner death caused by their own depression and emotional problems. Max is a ghost writer and everyone’s past ghosts seem to appear at some point during the course of the evening. As Jacqueline or “Jack” claims, the sense of time seems to be lost on Halloween, and everyone in the apartment is stuck there until all emotional problems have been aired. Jack is a trained Raki master who “brings things out of people” and who unconsciously acts as a funnel for everyone’s pain. She is a courageous person who asks Eddie out instead of waiting for him to ask her out; she also participates in battle re-enactments, indicating that she has warrior-like inclinations. In many ways Jack is the most likeable character in the play—her odd laugh and quirky social habits put us off at first, but once we get to know her and can compare to all of the other characters, we realize that Jack has the best grasp of what’s important in life and is the bravest/most honest of the group. She openly admits that she wants to be part of the life-cycle and she recognizes the spiritual side of Eddie and is drawn to it right away.

The roles of light and sound in the play seemed intertwined, just like lighting and thunder. The apartment buzzer would always sound before Max had one of his visions on the TV, much like the sound of thunder before a lightning strike. In fact the first half of the play, before everyone gathers in the apartment appears to be the calm before the storm. Emotions seethe underneath but do not come to the surface until the second half, when everyone explodes. Once everyone’s grievances have been aired, they can move on with their lives. Each character does this in a different way—Max must confront his dead son’s ghost by “staring down the lightning” and start to live again. Harriet must find her daughter and be her mother. Imogen’s water breaks on Harriet’s new carpet, creating an appropriate end to the play—life begins on the carpet just as everyone else goes out to begin their lives.

Caroline, Or Change

By Tony Kushner

1/2/07

This musical dealt with two pretty stock issues of the 1960’s in the United States—racism and class conflict. But it quickly becomes clear that this show deals with much more complex, less historically focused issues. The main character of the show, Caroline Tibedeau, is a black lady who cleans, cooks, and washes for a well-off Jewish family in Louisiana. As Caroline’s story unfolds, we learn what this show is really about: the importance of inner struggles and “costly, quiet victories.” These are victories which no one notices but are important just the same. Caroline Tibedeau proves to us that a person who protests publicly for civil rights is not necessarily braver or nobler than a quiet woman who works all day in order to feed her children. At the same time we see that it is Caroline’s intense inner strength that makes her so stubborn and uncompromising.

Tony Kushner states that “There are places inside us only song can reach.” This statement is especially appropriate to this musical as soon as we realize that Caroline is in a place in which seemingly nothing can reach her. Physically she is in a hot basement “fifteen feet below sea level,” and mentally she has buried herself beneath depression and monotony. There is a place inside of all of us where we feel trapped, where we can submerge our needs and desires. Caroline physically works in this place every day. But Caroline finds outlets within the basement; she personifies the washer, drier, and radio, all of which sing to her. The radio especially symbolizes the importance of song. It is the radio which keeps Caroline going; at the end of her day, when she is sitting on her porch, she sings that if she were president she would make Nat King Cole come and sing her soul to sleep every night. She is soothed and sustained by music; music reaches a place within her that nothing else can. We see a parallel to this in the character of Noah’s father, who is a clarinet player. He expresses his grief for his dead wife through his clarinet playing. At the Hanukkah party he is overcome and changes from happy dance music to a sad ballad. He expresses himself through music in a way that he cannot through words. So although Caroline buries herself in a hot basement and beneath layers of hate, and although Noah’s father is buried beneath grief, music is still able to reach both of them and touch their souls.

Caroline and Noah have an interesting relationship. In the beginning of the show Noah sees Caroline as an almost indestructible being, as powerful as the President of the United States. Both Noah and we as an audience admire Caroline for her unstinting hatred and bitterness. She plainly tells Noah that they are not friends and never will be; at the same time, she lets him light her cigarette every day, an endearing privilege which indicates her true feelings for him. A rift grows between Caroline and Noah when Caroline starts taking the change Noah leaves in his pockets. Although Rose tells Caroline she should do this, at first Caroline resists because she has too much pride. But necessity soon overcomes her hesitation. When she takes Noah’s twenty dollar bill, the situation explodes and Noah proclaims, “President Johnson is building a bomb to kill negroes and I hope it lands on you.” Caroline, overcome by emotions that she can no longer suppress, tells Noah that “Hell’s like this basement only hotter...and that’s where Jews go when they die.” She then gives him the money and walks out.

Caroline has spent every day in a hot basement doing grueling work for minimum pay. She has three children that she must raise by herself and refuses to accept help from anyone. In the end she realizes that she cannot take the change and remain a hard, unfeeling wall of hatred and pride. She returns to her job after asking God to “murder her” so that she can go to work without thinking about how horrible it is. Caroline sacrifices herself in order to provide for her children, who will be the catalysts for change. So although Caroline herself does not affect change in her society, her actions are no less noble than her daughter Emmie’s. Emmie defiantly destroys a monument of a confederate soldier in the town. Caroline cleans and irons every day. While the two may seem like incredibly different people who do opposite things, Caroline’s actions are no less important than Emmie’s. It is her “costly, quiet victories” which pave the way for change, and which make Emmie’s actions and the change she instigates possible.

Coram Boy

Adapted by Helen Edmunson

Novel by Jamila Gavin

1/3/07

This play is set “between heaven and hell,” i.e. right here on earth. Otis claims that he keeps his children slaves between “heaven and hell,” but ironically this is actually where every one in the play is kept. The human race is somewhere in the middle between heaven and hell, between good and evil. Human nature is portrayed as a mixture of good and bad rather than only one or the other, which makes the characters’ actions very believable. Past real life events combine with fantastical plot elements, intense stage effects, and historical musical selections to create a realistic but melodramatic show. Although at first we see a stark difference between the lives of the poor in London and the lives of the rich, we soon learn that death is the great equalizer of the social classes. Both rich and poor mothers are forced to give up their illegitimate children. Whether they are willingly duped or unknowingly duped, many of them end up paying for their children to be murdered. Otis, an intensely evil character, takes the women’s money in exchange for their children’s safety, when in reality he and his son Meshak take the women’s money and kill their children.

Very early on we see Meshak unwillingly burying a baby alive; he is so unwilling in fact that he passes out and his father must finish the job. This moment is a powerful moment because we see that Otis, although at first glance appears purely evil, is in fact shaken by his actions. His hand shakes uncontrollably as he pulls it away from the smothered child. This fear/hesitation adds another dimension to Otis’ character, making him more realistic. However, Otis seems to lose all semblance of humanity in the second half of the play, when we see him as a slave trader/torturer. In this half of the play the character’s roles become more stereotypically defined: Otis appears as a pure villain and Alex appears as a paternal hero. At this point, neither of them falters from these roles; Otis is willing to sink to any level to save his own skin, and Alex bravely tries to save his illegitimate son and kindly agrees to adopt his son’s best friend Toby as well. This separation of personalities into well-defined character roles helps make the ending more satisfying to an audience.

The way that the production handles the burying of the babies is gruesomely melodramatic. The stage is surrounded by dirt, which makes it possible for the plastic babies to be physically buried. It also serves as a constant reminder to the audience that this play is all about earthly passions and digressions. Historical events are not always pretty, and humans can often do cruel things. The ring of dirt also highlights the fact that Meshak is almost always outside of the action; he acts as a kind of observer who cannot participate in life events. He realizes that he cannot belong to earth, and begs his angel hallucination to take him away to heaven. It is appropriate that when Meshak takes Alex’s son to Coram that he gets a job as a gardener; for a brief part of his life Meshak is accepted and happy. He has the “angel child” and can literally work in and on the earth. Eventually Meshak saves his “angel child” by jumping into the ocean after him, submerging himself in an unearthly element and basically sacrificing his own life for the boy’s. The recurring Handel theme, “Oh death, where is thy sting” works extremely well

in this production, as do the major themes of Handel's Messiah, those of death and resurrection. The boys Meshak dies to save are virtually resurrected. Alex is resurrected when he comes back in the second half and his family takes him back in. Otis is practically resurrected in the second half of the play, when we learn that the man who hung was not him. This play deals with life and death, good and evil, and heaven and earth, and does it using both realistic and melodramatic techniques.

The Waves

Devised by Katie Mitchell

Book by Virginia Woolf

1/3/07

This play was created on stage using live sound and video effects. The combination of visual and audio effects made for an interesting and unexpected interpretation of Virginia Woolf's novel The Waves. Like the narrative style of the novel itself, this production focuses on non-traditional sequences of events and story telling by creating a sequence of meditations/incidents rather than a plot. Virginia Woolf herself believed that at "smooth narrative cannot be right." In The Waves she creates an intimate world of friends and family with overlapping narratives that do not always connect or match up with each other.

In this production the outside world seemed to be almost entirely ignored or occasionally feared; the only natural places mentioned are the ocean and the garden, and are seen as inner, intimate spaces. A garden, an inner place inside of everyone, is contained within walls and is for private exploration. The ocean, with its ebb and flow, is crucial to the development of this production. Each narrative meditation, each little flash of narrative is a wave in the ocean of events within this small circle of friends. Each moment is "given whole," as Woolf would have wanted, regardless of whether each comes chronologically after one another. But ironically chronology plays a very important role in the narrative as well. This is demonstrated by the dates which are written and then immediately erased on the blackboard. While these dates mark the succession of time, the fact that they are immediately erased is important. Perhaps it suggests that dates have very little meaning within this narrative, or that they only serve as reference points. Each date also seems to suggest a separate wave or chain of events which occurs afterwards.

This idea of life events as the ebbing and flowing of a tide can also be seen as motivation for Rhoda's depression and Woolf's depression as well. Rhoda seemed to be the character most closely associated with Woolf herself. Rhoda is also fascinated with water and with sticking her face in water. She has petals which she likes to watch float on a bowl of water and seems to identify with the petals, inanimate objects that just float where they are directed. Rhoda's fear and depression may be in part due to the fact that deep down she believes that life is just that; people float along and the events of their lives are determined by waves of events which are out of their power to control.

Percival, although he never speaks and we never get his specific point of view, is the character around which all the others seem to rotate. Everyone seems to love Percival or want to get his attention. Perhaps Percival is seen as the only one to have some sort of control over his life, to have some sort of decisive power to do certain things. When he

dies it is not clear whether his death is a suicide or not, and this rattles all of the other characters. The use of tea and tea sets shows very clearly everyone's individual reaction and how they are all different from each other's.

Much Ado About Nothing

By William Shakespeare

1/4/07

Whenever I see this play, Beatrice's monologue which begins "Oh if I were a man" always moves me. And although I have some reservations about setting this production in 1950s Cuba, nevertheless the monologue had its usual effect. The frustration Beatrice expresses is still very understandable today. Much Ado About Nothing is a play which deals with gender roles and the restrictions associated with these roles. Beatrice is unable to defend Hero's honor because she is a woman, so she is forced to ask Benedick to defend it for her. Hero is unable to defend herself from Claudio's accusations not because she is too timid, but because women are not able to defend themselves in Shakespeare's society. The art of argument/rhetoric is considered a male art; therefore Claudio and the prince can accuse Hero and argue that she is guilty without any counterargument from her. If Claudio himself were unchaste he would not be punished as severely as Hero, because it was more socially acceptable for a man to have sex before marriage than a woman. Obviously this relates to some deep-seated fears within Shakespeare's society. If a society is completely dependent on a system of lineage and inheritance and has no sure way of telling who the father of a baby is, it becomes very important that women do not have sex with anyone else besides their husbands. This may help to explain the extremely humiliating scene that Claudio and the prince create at the church, and why it is acceptable for them to do so; it even explains why the prince and Claudio do not feel guilty when they first learn of Hero's death. They believe her crime is serious enough to merit death.

We also see a negative portrayal of bastardism in the character of Don John, the prince's illegitimate half brother. Don John seems to have been born solely to make mischief for others. Don John seems predestined to be an evil character because he is born a bastard. Don John is portrayed well in this production—he has a kind of malicious glee in everything he does. His henchmen seem to have more responsive consciences than he, as we see when Borachio confesses. Borachio feels too guilty to stay silent once he learns that Hero has died. He explains his actions and Don John's actions and begs for forgiveness. Don John flees and tries to escape justice from his brother rather than apologizing for or repenting his crimes.

The use of masks tie into these gender roles as well. During the masquerade ball Benedick listens to Beatrice unknowingly insult him because he is covering up his true identity with a mask. Beatrice insults Benedick because she does not realize she is talking to him. Benedick's mask in a sense emasculates him and leaves him open for ridicule from a woman. He puts on a feminine role when conversing with Beatrice, who seems more masculine because of her caustic, outspoken phrases. Don John has a figurative mask on, since he puts on the semblance of friendship but underneath creates strife. And the most important scene involving masks, in which Hero is essentially resurrected from the dead in order to marry Claudio, presents all kinds of interesting

ideas. At first Claudio does not know which of the masked women is the one he must marry. He is not allowed to see her face before their vows, and so has no idea who he is marrying; in fact in this production there were cloaks worn as well, so he does not know if he's even marrying a woman. When Hero lifts her mask we see that she has become equal to Claudio and has found a voice with which she can defend herself.

At the same time, each character ends up with their counterpart by the end of the play because of the gender roles play. Beatrice appears more outgoing and subsequently "male" because of her profuse and freely used words. Her maleness is accentuated further in this production through appearance. The actress who plays Beatrice is very tall and wears high heels with a black, no nonsense skirt and a crisp white blouse, which is in stark contrast to the other young ladies who wear flowing, flowery dresses. Beatrice and Benedick refuse to follow their gender roles, and so must be taught to accept them. Both Claudio and Hero blindly accept their gender roles, and so they must be taught to redefine them. By the end of the play, Claudio and Hero have learned that tradition expectations must be redefined to fit their relationship, and Beatrice and Benedick have learned that they must compromise with tradition to succeed together.

A Winter's Tale

By William Shakespeare

1/7/07

This play by Shakespeare fits under the category of "romance," because of its fairy tale nature, its theme of transformation, and the long gap in time and space that occurs within it. Like any good fairy tale or romance, the characters' names help to define their roles; Leontes is a lion-king, a strong figure who does not back down from his convictions. Polixenes is a stranger in a strange land, someone who is an unknown variable to the king. Hermione strives to create harmony between the two kings. And of course Perdita is lost literally and figuratively until the very end of the play when she finds her mother and is reunited at last with both of her parents. Paulina deals with issues of faith and innocence, of keeping faith throughout the years and the perpetual nature of Christianity. Names which define a character or at least point to the character's role in the play are not realistic; in real life people do not come with tags that suggest what their personality is like. If you meet someone named Katherine, you do not automatically assume that she is pure of heart, and if you meet someone named Leo you do not assume that he is kingly and lion-like. But in this play the true nature of things is revealed, so even if these characters' actions do not always support their names, their names serve as a constant reminder to you as an audience member that they cannot escape their own natures.

The amphitheatre set up of this show and its ability to get audience members onto the physical stage basically makes the audience into a Greek chorus. The audience members are spectators/commentators and they are the ones who ultimately judge the characters' actions. It was interesting to watch the facial expressions of some of the people on the stage; judgment could be observed just by watching their faces.

This tale is not realistic, but its unbelievable nature allows it to point out certain truths about life and death. It is a story that you tell on a long winter's night, not only to pass the time, but also to teach a lesson. The characters within the play live on the edge

of death, just as the entire human race does. Leontes' son dies and his wife seemingly dies in the first half of the play; he also believes that his daughter has died too. The fear of becoming a cuckold is very strong for Leontes in the beginning of the play; his fear of replacement blinds him to the truth and he refuses to believe even the Oracle's words. By indulging in his fear of replacement Leontes destroys the one person whom he actually wanted to replace him—his only son.

Attolitus plays an important role in this story; in this production he appears to come out of the ground, symbolizing his close relationship with earth and with the sexualized, phallic nature of the earth which is portrayed in the shepherds' dance. He is almost completely naked, dirty, and unkempt but does not seem bothered by it. Attolitus is very much in touch with his earthly self. He is sexually portrayed and is not ashamed to lie, cheat, and steal in order to get what he wants. At the same time he is character who robs people of "unconsidered trifles." Although his name means "self-wolf," he unknowingly guides those that he unburdens by bringing them closer to self-knowledge. He acts as a kind of bridge between others, and unwittingly helps Perdita find her lost father and learn of her heritage.

The show begins with a New Year's Eve count down. Time is a crucial element in this play, one that helps to heal and transform. The gap of sixteen years allows Hermione to grieve for her lost children and for Leontes to truly repent his decisions. Sixteen years, four groups of four, has a symmetry which appeals to the Christian tradition of symbolic amounts of time and is just enough time for Leontes' daughter Perdita to come of age. In the end it is art that redeems life. After the sixteen years have passed and the lost daughter has been found, Paulina reveals to Leontes and Perdita the "statue" of Hermione. This incredibly life-like statue turns out to actually be Hermione, preserved for sixteen years so that she could reawaken when the time was right. This metamorphic reference to Ovid's Pygmalion story suggests that human folly and error can be redeemed.

Twelfth Night

By William Shakespeare

1/7/07

Appearances and mirrors come into play in this all-male production of *Twelfth Night*. I had mixed feelings about the all-male cast; while I appreciate the idea of being authentic to Shakespeare's time period, I also missed seeing female actresses playing the female roles. At times it appeared that the actors who played Olivia, Viola, and Maria played caricatures of women rather than three-dimensional female characters, although this may have been a conscious choice on the part of the actors or director. No wigs or stuffed bras were used to make the men more feminine looking, so as an audience member you never forget that these female characters are being played by men; this creates an alteration of perception on the audience's part rather than an alteration of physical appearance on the actor's part. The choice to have an all-male cast does not have to do with keeping the production "authentic" to the Elizabethan era, since the costumes and sets appeared to be circa 1940s.

In the beginning of the play, we see a fairly bare stage save for some covered furniture. As the play opens, Feste, the fool enters but he is not necessarily in the

character of Feste yet. He seems to be remembering something that happened, and masked actors slowly appear upon the stage as he sings a slow, sad song. The covers are drawn off of the furniture and the lights come up quickly to begin the show, creating a stark contrast with the melancholy scene that came before. The audience quickly learns that when the actors are in masks they are not the characters they play in the show. The only person who never wears a mask is Feste, the wise fool who seems to be orchestrating or at least remembering the entire play. It seemed vaguely unsettling that such a seemingly light-hearted comedy should start with such an ominous beginning.

This beginning is just one aspect of the play's creative direction which seems to suggest something more sinister or disturbing beneath the play's surface. Here is where the ideas of mirrors and appearances come into play. There are several large mirrors on the uncovered furniture, so the actors can look at themselves when they are on stage, and the characters can see their own reflections/actions. Also, certain characters act as mirrors for each other; Olivia acts as a kind of mirror for Viola, since she also has just lost a brother and is hiding her beauty in mourning. Viola is hiding her sexuality in men's clothing. When Viola/Cesario first enters Olivia's house, she cannot tell who she is because she is veiled. Orsino falls in love with an image of Olivia instead of the actual Olivia, and Olivia herself falls in love with an image of a man (Cesario) who is not in fact a man. The director seems to be focusing on the deception of appearances. When we think about this idea a little deeper, we realize that it is slightly disturbing that everyone in this play does not seem to know themselves or others. Malvolio is a comic example of an outward appearance that does not match the inner character; his awkward smile and disturbing yellow stockings are put on for others. He is completely convinced to appear this way because he thinks Olivia wants him to. He is literally kept in the dark by Feste and Sir Toby, symbolizing his inability to find self-truth. The only character who seems to recognize the true nature of others is Feste, but even he does not realize that Cesario is in fact a woman. The director seems to have picked up on the idea of Feste as a narrator, as a character who is slightly above the events occurring within the play. He is the "corruptor of words," the corruptor of people's self-images, so it is especially appropriate that he is the only one without a mask. At some point he sees everyone's true nature.

The all-male cast also creates interesting tensions between the love interests. The attraction between Orsino and Cesario is kept humorous simply because homosexuality makes people uncomfortable. It was true in Shakespeare's day and it's still true today. There is a sense of an unspoken danger that lurks beneath the surface of the humor, a fear of subversion that impossible to see from something's appearance (we saw this idea in *Bash* as well, in which a young man kills another man simply because he refuses to believe that someone could look like his normal father and be so different beneath). Shakespeare keeps the relationship between Orsino and Cesario humorous, and the director's/actors' staging decisions keep it humorous as well, so the issue is never directly addressed. There is always some physical distance between Orsino and Cesario, but Olivia throws herself on Cesario the second time she meets him. Also, Orsino is not considered a "full-male" character according to Renaissance play tradition. He moons over a woman instead of wooing her actively, and seems more interested in music and art than in manly pursuits. This may be why it is acceptable for Orsino to be attracted to Cesario.

In the end everyone's true nature is brought to light. Cesario goes back to being Viola so Orsino's attraction to her is now acceptable. Olivia realizes that the man she married is not Cesario but Sebastian and seems to be happy with her choice. Olivia literally marries the appearance of something rather than the actual person, which is a disturbing idea. Malvolio appears and is told of the trick played upon him; it is always interesting to see how the actor playing Malvolio deals with this scene, because Malvolio has essentially become a broken man. This comedy has many disturbing undercurrents which are accentuated by the choice of set and the way the action is framed.

Merry Wives of Windsor (The Musical)

By William Shakespeare

Lyrics by Ranjit Bolt

1/7/07

The focus of this musical comedy is on the cleverness of women. Mistress Ford, Mistress Page, Mrs. Quickly, and Ann Page all triumph in some way over the men in their lives. Ford, Page, and Quickly all succeed in teaching Falstaff a lesson, and Ann Page succeeds in marrying the man of her choosing. They do this by using traditionally feminine, domestic methods. Falstaff is carried out in a dirty laundry basket, which the men do not think to look in because they never do laundry. The second time Falstaff sneaks out he is dressed in women's clothing; this tricks Mr. Ford again because he is fooled by a feminine appearance. Ford hates the "Old Witch of Redwood," because she is old, ugly, and creepy. She is the symbolic hag who represents the dark arts of female magic, a power which he as a man is afraid of and scorns.

In this circle of women, Mrs. Quickly plays a central role. Although originally a minor character, her part is rewritten to give Dame Judi Dench a role which is fun but meaningful to play. A woman of many interests, Mrs. Quickly tries to serve several clients; Dr. Caius, Slender, and Fenton all solicit her help, but of course she has her own goals which she cleverly accomplishes. Mrs. Quickly also has unresolved feelings for Falstaff, a philanderer with seemingly no moral reservations.

There is an interesting parallel between the character of Falstaff and the character of Malvolio from *Twelfth Night*. Both have horrendous tricks played upon them, but Falstaff seems to be more resilient than Malvolio. He does not learn his lesson until three different tricks have been played upon him. Both seem to have an insufferable amount of unwarranted pride and both seek advancement through well-off women. But while Malvolio is incredibly angry and cannot see the humor in his situation, Falstaff is able to enjoy a good joke. While Malvolio swears revenge and storms off at the end of *Twelfth Night*, marring the happiness on stage, Falstaff revels in the fact that Ford and his wife were tricked as well and then joins everyone for the celebratory feast. Through these two characters Shakespeare deftly shows how important a sense of humor is when dealing with life.

This production adapted the original play to form a new, musical version which I think was an intelligent choice. The musical is a modern genre and is to today's audience what the Elizabethan comedy was to Shakespeare's audience. The choreography of the dance numbers cleverly paralleled some forms of Renaissance dancing; square dancing suddenly broke into a form of Renaissance dance in order to show the parallel between

lines of dancing partners today and then. The music serves as a welcome update to the play and adds to Shakespeare's words rather than distracting from them.

Rock-n-Roll

By Tom Stoppard

1/8/07

Throughout the course of this play we see the main characters Max and Jan struggling to answer hard questions: what is it that makes us human? Can we create a perfect society if we are inherently flawed? Ironically, it is through the women in their lives that they find answers. In my favorite scene, Max's wife Eleanor, who is dying from breast cancer, is helping a student translate a famous poem of Sappho that deals with the physical expression of emotions. In the poem Sappho (or Sappho's narrator) knows she is in love because of how she feels. Lenka, the student, and Eleanor essentially get into a debate about whether Sappho's feelings are inextricably tied up in her love for this woman or whether she simply observes the feelings as a biochemical reaction. Max supports some of Lenka's ideas, but once she starts talking about the Greek gods as the initiator of Sappho's love he loses interest. Afterwards Max relates the idea of humans joining together to society, extemporizing on the good and bad aspects of communism and whether it will work or not. Eleanor passionately interrupts him and tells him that she doesn't care about his theories, about his separation of mind and body. In one of the most powerful passages of the play she says:

“They've cut, cauterized and zapped away my breasts, my ovaries, my womb, half my bowel, and a nutmeg of my brain, and I am undiminished, I'm exactly who I've always been. *I am not my body*. My body is nothing without *me*, that's the truth of it.”

Max still does not understand what Eleanor is trying to tell him, which is that without the soul the self does not exist. Max, who does not really believe in spirituality, says that the brain, the scientific mind is all that there is. Eleanor rejects Max's word “mind,” as if it were disgusting. She does not want a machine that unfeelingly pumps out hormones and chemicals, a reaction caused by scientific stimuli at her funeral. She wants Max's soul, but Max does not believe in a soul. He believes that his mind is his self, and that is all that he loves Eleanor with. They reach a kind of understanding at the end of this scene, when Eleanor tells Max that it took some guts to say that he only loved her with his mind. She realizes that when he talks about his mind he is talking about what she thinks of as a soul. Eleanor sees the machinery of the human mind as negative, while Max finds it fascinating. This pairing of two characters with completely opposite philosophies is very powerful and demonstrates how each of them can learn from the other. Instead of angrily storming off after this fight, Eleanor and Max embrace and hold each other. Even though they believe opposite things, they can reconcile themselves to these differences and can understand why the other believes it.

This idea of understanding systems ties into the political debate between Jan and Max. Max is a staunch communist but Jan is hesitant about the practical side of communism. Max believes in the soundness of the theory and believes that it will eventually work, while Jan cannot help but see its negative effects within his home country. While capitalism may not be perfect, Jan cannot help but reminisce about his

time spent in England and about the freedom he had there. Max thinks sacrifices must be made for the good of everyone, but Jan only sees how these sacrifices hurt individual people. This is most clearly demonstrated in the destruction of Jan's records. Rock and roll obviously is used throughout the play to create an atmosphere of rebellion and political unrest that was felt in the sixties. Jan's collection is destroyed by government officials who think the music is subversive or dangerous to the communist state. The collective is more important than the individual in communist theory. Max's belief in systems, such as the mind as a scientific machine, relates to his belief in social systems. He believes in creating a machine in which everyone has a place and a job, whereas Jan just wants everyone to be left alone to lead their own lives. In the end both adjust their ideas; Max realizes that communism may not work and Jan realizes that he must become involved in society in order to deserve his rights. Jan sums up their relationship with these words: "It [is] human to disagree about the truth."

Of course the rock-n-roll music of the sixties plays a huge role in this show. The Plastic People of the Universe symbolize pure, unflinching rebellion to Jan. They refuse to compromise any of their standards in order to be allowed to play in communist Prague. But even they cannot rebel forever. Towards the end of the play Jan discovers that the lead singer has quit in order to go to America for a better record deal. The music of the sixties symbolized an idealistic desire people had to rebel for noble reasons, to throw off the chains of old governmental systems and forge new, perfect systems. By the end of the play Jan and Max realize that the human race cannot form a perfect society, but it is still noble for continuing with its efforts. The play ends with a joyful scene, in which Jan and Esme start dancing at a Rolling Stones concert in Prague. Music in this play is seen as an expression of self but it also as an inspiration for rebellion and political change.

The Seafarer

Conor McPherson

1/8/07

At the beginning of this play you would never guess that it is a psychological study of the good and evil sides of human nature. The set is a somewhat messy, homely living room, covered in beer cans and beige furniture. Two old Irish brothers reside there, one of them blind and cantankerous, one of them quiet and bitter. The play begins with Sharky picking up the mess from the previous night's drinking. Time seems to move very slowly; Sharky picks up slowly until his brother Richard wakes up. When Richard wakes, Sharky gets him breakfast and helps him up, both of which Richard seems to resent. Their relationship is marked with constant bickering and insults, and their lives do not seem meaningful. We soon learn that it is Christmas Eve, and their only plans are to drink and possibly play cards. Of course references to Irish alcoholism and understated depression occur throughout the show.

The point at which the show takes an unexpected turn is when their friends come over to play poker. Their friend Nicky brings a man he met at the pub, a Mr. Lockhart. When all of the men except for Sharky and Mr. Lockhart go outside to chase some wins, Mr. Lockhart tells Sharky that he's come to play cards for his soul. The devil has come on Christmas Eve to make good on the bargain Sharky made with him years ago. It is up to the group of men from which he has separated himself, his "comitatus" to save him.

We soon learn that these men are not your typical, “good” men. Each of them has his imperfections and downright sins. Ivan, Sharky and Richard’s good friend, may be at least partly responsible for a fire that killed several people. Neither Ivan nor Nicky have good relationships with their wives; both refuse to go home on Christmas Eve even when asked. When he was drunk Sharky may have beaten an old man to death outside a bar; he met Mr. Lockhart while in prison for this.

Appropriately it is the blind man, Richard who, although the most alcoholic of the group, is the one with the most faith. Like many blind seers in mythology, Richard is able to see inwardly because his outward sight has been taken away. It is his hand of cards that he shares with Ivan that saves Sharky’s soul, when it looks as if all hope has been lost. This brings us to one of the most important ideas within the play. There is an incredible beauty in a race of “insects” that can triumph over an eternal, all-powerful being. In the end it seems as if these men’s flaws help to save them. They basically out-drink the devil. Mr. Lockhart says, “I don’t think I’ve ever drunk this much before,” and Sharky replies “Welcome to our house.” Like so many folk tales before it, *The Seafarer* describes the triumph of human ingenuity and faith over evil. Although the men do not exactly trick the devil with their cleverness as Daniel Webster does in his story, they still are able to beat him because they are human and are therefore redeemable. They may not be great people; they may not even be good people. But as Richard says, people have the ability to change, an ability which Mr. Lockhart does not possess but one that Sharky does.

Mr. Lockhart cannot stand the sound of music because it is a human art form which changes with human emotions and perceptions. You almost feel sorry for Mr. Lockhart because he is locked out of Heaven; he is unredeemable and doesn’t seem to understand why. He describes Hell as cold rather than hot, an internal torment rather than an outward physical torment. There in Hell is basically where Sharky already lives; there is a never-ending internal torment with no hope of forgiveness or redemption. In Heaven there is a “peace of mind” with no sense of time, whereas in Hell time goes on forever and you are aware of it going by slowly. This sense of time going by slowly is one that the characters already seem to have; it is not until Mr. Lockhart leaves and Sharky seems to have been redeemed that time speeds up again. Christmas Eve lasts for most of the play, and then Christmas morning comes and the men start moving and getting ready for church and time stops standing still.

Themes of Christianity and Catholicism are very important to this play. Richard wants everyone to go to mass together on Christmas morning even though they’re all hung over. He claims it’s for the beer that the monks make, but we suspect that he has other, more noble motives. Richard and Sharky reconnect by the end of the play, and Sharky is accepted back into the group which he scorned. They all go together to take communion in church, symbolizing their brotherhood as fellow humans. Richard also gives them all cell phones for Christmas so that they can stay in touch. Richard, with his canny inner sight, tells Sharky that Mr. Lockhart was a “maudlin fucker” and that he had a “funny smell.” Although he didn’t know exactly how serious the situation was, he definitely sensed that Sharky was in danger, and stalled him leaving long enough for Ivan to realize their cards were winners. When Mr. Lockhart leaves, stars can be seen on the stairs, reminiscent of Dante’s journey out of Hell. As the brothers and friends move out of danger and into a new tomorrow, they are able to see the stars.

The Enchanted Pig**Music by Jonathan Dove****Words by Alasdair Middleton****1/9/07**

This whimsical fairy tale opera incorporates some traditional fairy tale devices with some more modern ideas. In the beginning we see a traditional trio of princesses who are awaiting marriage. When their father goes off to war they are instructed not to open the secret room but like all curious princesses in fairy tales do it anyways. Right away we see the traditional fairy tale roles; the princesses are embroidering when the show opens and the men are getting ready to go off to battle. They sisters also have ridiculously large hair-dos, which would make it impossible for them to do any kind of strenuous activity. As soon as they open the forbidden room and read the forbidden Book of Fate, our heroine Flora knows something has gone wrong. The book tells her that she, unlike her sisters who will marry princes, will marry a pig. When Flora meets the pig she must marry, the story moves into a kind of coming of age/puberty story.

When Flora and Pig arrive at their house, Pig forces Flora to role in the mud, which she is embarrassed to do. While this initiation by dirt may seem at first to go against the traditional fairy tale norm-a beautiful princess is not supposed to marry a Pig and role in dirt-it actually has a much more complex meaning. This idea of “dirtying” oneself is symbolic of sexual maturity and of the beginning of sexual urges. At this point Flora has also lost her high complex hair-do, so she starts to look more realistic and less like a fantastical fairy-tale princess. When she gets to their bedroom, she realizes that she actually sort of liked rolling in the mud; it was liberating and “in some way good.”

Unfortunately Flora loses her husband almost as soon as she starts to know and love him, because she betrays his trust by tricking him. An old hag offers a solution to her husband’s enchantment which she just can’t resist, and of course the old hag turns out to be evil. The presence of the old woman symbolizes a generational conflict between the young and old, something which Flora must overcome in order to become an adult. She must separate herself from any parental figure such as the old woman and make a journey on her own. As her husband is dragged away he tells her what she needs to do in order to save him, creating a mutual agency rather than a purely female agency. At the same time she is the one who journeys to the north wind, the moon, the sun, and finally the Milky Way while wearing heavy iron shoes.

Along the way scientist/doctor figures appear to comment on the story line and to study the nature of Flora’s love. As the opera progresses the definition of love slowly changes from an immature, idealized version of love found in fairy tales to a more mature, realistic version of love. Flora questions the north wind and his wife if they still love each other, and they tell her that love is not always easy; love is hard work. By the end of the opera Flora has learned that love is a “broken crown” and “blisters from traveling.” Love is a man who “wakes up,” rather than one who remains asleep. These definitions of love may seem negative or depressing, but they prove that realistic love is more fulfilling because it is hard work, because so much effort goes into it. Love is not always at first sight, and it does not have a lot to do with appearances. Flora begins to realize she loves her husband even before she knows he is not a pig; she gazes into his

eyes and sees that they are beautiful and sad. She sees through his hairy, dirty, smelly exterior. Like all good fairy tales this show teaches an important lesson—real love may appear less beautiful or may be harder work, but in the end it is more rewarding than the stereotypical, modern idea of “fairy tale” love.

Thérèse Raquin

By Emile Zola

1/9/07

In this naturalist play about the psychology of guilt, it is hard to tell if Therese herself or Laurent is more to blame for the murder of Thérèse’s husband Camille. When the play opens, we quickly learn that Thérèse is an outcast and has been her whole life. She is an orphan who imagines that her real mother was an African princess, and that she was conceived out of wedlock as a result of passionate love. Zola is experimenting with the idea of genetics, with nature vs. nurture. Perhaps Thérèse is not altogether responsible for her actions because the inclination was already built into her nature. This makes the issue of Camille’s murder even more complicated, and explains why the novel was so shocking to readers of its time. Zola saw this work as a “scientific anatomy of murder,” or a “naturalistic manifesto” based on precise observation and analysis. This idea is hinted at in the conversation between Laurent and Michaut, the police inspector. Michaut is an observer just like Zola, and so Laurent and Thérèse fear his discovery of the murder they commit. Before he and Thérèse decide to kill Camille, Laurent asks Michaut if many murders go unpunished, to which Michaut replies “Oh many do.” This cryptic statement foreshadows the eventual punishment of Laurent and Thérèse, a kind of self-punishment inflicted upon themselves by their own guilt and shame. Although they are not punished by society or the police, they are punished by their own inner demons.

Thérèse has a seemingly dual nature; at times she is introspective and sullen and at other times extroverted and extremely sexual. She can be quiet and shy or loud and assertive. We can certainly sympathize with Thérèse’s circumstances; she is an orphan who is completely dependent on Mrs. Raquin, Camille’s mother, and so has to marry Camille out of a sense of gratitude to his mother, even though Camille was raised with her as a kind of brother. Thérèse is forced into an incestuous marriage with a man she cannot love; Camille is overly effeminate and needy, an annoying hypochondriac who is over-indulged by his mother. But does it excuse her actions? Do we as an audience sympathize enough with Thérèse and Laurent to feel bad for their suicide in the end? The only things that truly forces them to murder are money and opinions, motives that are not usually seen as sympathetic motives. If Thérèse and Laurent had just run away together they would be poor and perhaps ostracized by society, but no one would lose a life. Laurent and Thérèse care very deeply about appearances but not about actual truth/actions; and since this is a naturalist play, we can only conclude that Zola suggests that many or all humans have these ideas as motivation. Perhaps we only do not kill others because we are afraid that others will find out. Thérèse tries to hide the fact that she helped kill Camille from his mother, and even tries to downplay her role in it once she finds out, begging for forgiveness. But if there was not that fear of discovery, would Thérèse and Laurent be tortured? Possibly not.

In the end we must decide if we feel bad for Thérèse or if we see her as a villain. She is after all the eponymous character of the play, so she must be held more responsible for the murder than Laurent even though she may not have physically pushed Camille into the water. Laurent and Thérèse are able to embrace only as they die, because they have finally found peace from their torment. Mrs. Raquin acts as a kind of priest in this moment, and Thérèse seems to think that she has granted her death as a kind of forgiveness for her sins. This eventual gory ending is foreshadowed in the marriage of Thérèse and Laurent; a funeral procession is occurring while their marriage ceremony is going on. The setting stays the same throughout the play, acting as a kind of visual trap for the two main characters. It is as if they are trapped by their criminal action and they have no choice but to spiral towards their inevitable, melodramatic end. The montage of poses cleverly demonstrates this incredibly frustrating feeling of being trapped; each time the lights come up it is as if Thérèse and Laurent are frozen positions they have been forced into. We learn from this play that murder is a complicated thing, something which often has a complex web of motives and blame attached to it. Society is often partly responsible and all people, including seemingly normal, everyday people, have the capacity to commit a murder.

Amy's View
By David Hare
1/9/07

Amy's view is that "love conquers all." It is relatively simple and easy to explain, but not so easy to follow as we see in this mother-daughter play. Amy and her mother Esme both change as the play progresses until the power dynamic has become completely reversed. At the beginning of the play Esme is in control and is more powerful than her daughter Amy; when Amy tells her not to tell her boyfriend Dominic of her pregnancy, her mother blithely ignores her request because she knows better and tells him anyway. She then exits the room and lets them talk it out. Towards the end of the play, after Esme has lost all of her money and is about to lose her house, she seems to rely on Amy for support and comfort. Esme is constantly remembering how things used to be, while Amy seems to focus on the present and future. Evelyn, Esme's mother-in-law, loses her memory and cannot remember her son, Esme's dead husband Bernard. Evelyn acts a kind of constant reminder for Esme of how her life used to be; she used to be a successful performer with a great husband and a loving daughter. Her life used to make sense. As Esme's life slowly spirals out of control she finds it harder and harder to listen to her daughter's seemingly naive advice. Esme finds it impossible to love Dominic, a man who does not believe in the usefulness of theatre as a form of human expression, and a man who treats her daughter poorly.

Dominic tries to explain Amy's view to Esme after Amy's death. He tells her that it means you have to "love people without any conditions." But of course Amy could not even follow her own advice while she was alive. She fought with her mother before her death and they remained irreconciled until Amy died unexpectedly. This idea is never really resolved; we don't see Esme and Dominic magically becoming friends after Amy's death, nor do we see Esme crying and admitting that Amy was right all along. We do get a small glimpse though of a kind of redemption for Esme; that is the relationship she has

with the young, inexperienced actor who is in the play with her at the end. He is really interested in learning from Esme, and seems to have become a kind of son-like figure. But Hare doesn't try to offer us any easy, feel-good answers from the end of this play. If any large lesson can be gleaned, it is simply that life goes on and we continue to learn.

This play can at times feel a little contrived. Dominic and Esme especially get into debates about the theater as "elitist," and argue about what the true purpose of theater is. Commercials in TV programs have shortened the modern attention span, so modern audiences have a hard time sitting through a two to three hour play. The difference that Dominic does not see is that audiences have to engage for live theater in a way that they don't for movies or TV. Movies and TV programs entertain or thrill rather than engage. The young actor working with Esme asks her how she always gets the audience to engage with her, and she tells him that one day he will be able to do it too. This play is a play about the sustainability of live theater, so while at times it makes very valid points about theater as an art form, it also comes off as a little preachy.

Bash

Neil La Bute

1/10/07

Although this play dealt with a several ancient Greek myths, it was incredibly relevant and heart-wrenching for modern audiences. The first act, entitled "Iphigenia in Orem," is a monologue performed by a character that at first seems like a rather boring but basically nice business man. All of the characters in the play are Mormon. His manner is ingratiating and almost apologetic. He solicits the audience's attention and sympathy from the very start, so when his comments start to change in tone we don't realize it right away. A few mildly sexist comments slip past before we realize that this man has an incredibly strong inferiority complex concerning women. In fact he seems to have a very strong absence of self; he only strives to be average and wants to present himself in a certain way. He is more intent on appearing a certain way than on being a certain way, a theme that runs through many of the plays we watched. His comments start out as defensive about his gender consciousness; he says "you guys" and quickly explains that he means that in a general way; he is not assuming that we're all guys. We slowly realize that he seems to have a different sense of ethics than you might think. He recognizes language is dangerous but also as a means to an end. He went to college in order to get a job, according to him for all the "right reasons." His reasons are not necessarily what we would consider right, but they are to him. He has a sense of "pop culture" ethics, ethics he has picked up from movies or the business world. He uses fate as an excuse for his actions, claiming that in order to follow his system of ethics he had to do certain things.

In the end the truth comes out: he murdered his baby daughter in order to get ahead at his job. Of course he doesn't just come out and say this; there are layers of truth which become closer and closer to the actual truth. His jacket comes off and beneath we see a short-sleeved shirt, making him look about ten years younger. Again he uses fate as a kind of excuse; it is very appropriate that he's watching "Wheel of Fortune" before he decides to do it. His reasons are complex, more complex than he seems to realize, and it is clear that he is trying to get the truth out of himself, to try and understand his action

and to try and defend them. But there are no easy explanations and no way out of the horrible thing he has done. La Bute is incredibly skilled at creating a character we relate to and sympathize with who slowly turns into something more sinister, someone we want to separate ourselves from. All of the characters in this show are like this; they are completely human and remind us of something within ourselves. They horrify us because we know that every single one of us has the potential to do what they have done.

The next act in the play, entitled “Gaggle of Saints,” was two monologues together, a young woman and man. John and Sue are a couple who drive to New York City with some friends to go to a high school reunion party. Again, these two appear like the stereotypical, suburban, middle class young college couple. They seem to have good intentions and are very loyal to their fraternities. They value friendship and follow polite social norms. The men look after the women and they have a strong family orientation. They believe in mission work and have high cultural values. So when John sees a homosexual man in Central Park, you hope that he will just walk by. He’ll be uncomfortable but he’ll be tolerant. But there is something about the man that really bothers him; it is that the man looks like his father. He sees his father in this man and consequently sees himself. Perhaps he has some underlying homosexual tendencies that he is afraid to admit to himself or perhaps his whole belief system is just called into question in this moment. But he decides to do something about it. He tricks the man, Chet, into kissing him and then whistles for his friends. They beat the man to death, John taking the lead by pounding his head into the bathroom floor. But this is not a simple hate crime; his friends want to know why John let the man kiss him before he called for them, why he let him touch him. John does not explain, but we can hazard a guess. The things that scare us the most are the things we hide from ourselves. John convinces himself that this murder was a kind of mission; he was doing God’s work because in the Bible homosexuality is a sin. But beneath this reason we know that John enjoyed kissing the man. John is terrified that he might be like this man. He is terrified that his father might be like this man. And so he has to destroy that fear by destroying Chet.

The third act of the play is entitled “Medea Redux,” about a young woman who gave birth to her eighth grade teacher’s child. She appears to be a victim, a fourteen-year old-girl who was sexually abused by a teacher and then left to raise her child on her own. Throughout her monologue she is trying to remember the word that her teacher taught her about fate; she finally remembers in her last few minutes that the word is “Adakia,” a Greek word for out of balance. It could be a mistaken word for “Ataxia,” which is the idea that the world is going off its axis and mortals are to blame for the unbalance. When her teacher ironically moves away to Phoenix in order to rise from the ashes of his old life, he marries and finds a new job. He is not punished for what he has done because she does not tell anyone who the father is. When she finally meets him again after many years and sees the triumph in his eyes, she cannot take it. He sees his son and thinks he has gotten away with it; he thinks that maybe the world is in balance, maybe humans don’t mess it up by their actions, that it’s all just up to fate. Like Medea in the ancient Greek myth, the protagonist kills her child in order to prove to her abuser that life isn’t like that. We can change fate and we are able to throw the world out of balance. She is the only character out of the three one-acts who takes control; she does not blame her actions on fate or some kind of sequence of events that spin out of control. She may even have been planning this for the last ten years. And although we revile her actions, we

cannot help but sympathize with her circumstances and in some way admire her convictions. She emerges from a kind of submerged, adolescent/passive state with an action that shocks and horrifies but nonetheless proves her point.

Billy Elliot (The Musical)

Lyrics by Lee Hall

Music by Elton John

1/10/07

This show was so much fun. I've seen the movie and I must say that I like the musical even better. The young actor playing Billy is a phenomenal dancer and singer, especially for his age. This show also has a fairy tale quality; Billy's mother is dead and acts as a kind of fairy godmother. Billy can talk to her and tell her about his love for dance, something which he cannot tell his father or brother about. There is also a fantasy scene in which Billy sees the professional dancer he could turn out to be and dances with him. Billy is able to see the possibilities of his future and really wants to pursue his dream. There is also the theme of leaving home behind in order to attain a better future, and sacrifice being made by the older generation in order to give the new generation better opportunities. This theme, also present in *Caroline, Or Change*, is why Billy's father tries to break the picket lines and go back to work in the mine. But we soon learn that solidarity is more important; his older son pulls him back and the strikers all chip in enough money for Billy to go audition for a school of dance.

Billy's father goes through an important transformation; at first he is completely against the idea of Billy dancing, not only because he thinks dancing is for girls, but because he doesn't think it's a practical career or one that he can support his son in. Once he finally realizes that this is Billy's dream and it is the only thing that will truly make him happy, he goes against his strongest, deepest ideology in order to help his son. He breaks the picket lines. Even though Tony eventually wrestles him back across, it is clear to us as an audience how much this blue collar worker is willing to sacrifice for his son. Billy sings that when he dances it feels like, "electricity burning inside of me, and I'm free, I'm free." Billy dances to escape the depressing life of the mining town and also to help others escape as well.

This also leads us to the idea of community. The miners sing the anthem, "solidarity forever" even though they know they will not get higher wages or better working conditions. They're spirits are unbroken even after a year of not working. They boldly sing their song as they sink into the earth, they're hard hat lights glaring straight ahead. This song, although simple in tune and harmony expresses a heartfelt sentiment which is hard to ignore. This idea of community and brotherhood is present throughout the entire small mining town, as shown by the Christmas pantomime scene. The entire town gathers and participates; some people dress up as Maggie Thatcher and all participate in a political critique of the current administration in the songs "Merry Christmas Maggie Thatcher" and "Oh my darling Heseltine." These people are poor and their voices are rarely heard, but united their spirits stay strong. Family structures are very important and the structure of the small town is as well. Without each other they have nothing.

Dance enters into this idea not only as a personal expression, but as a social and political statement as well. Billy's form of dance, ballet, is a traditional form but he uses it in new ways. He also uses tap quite a bit in order to express more passionate emotions such as anger or resentment. Billy offers hope to those back in his home town as a boy who can make a better life for himself doing something he loves. He can protest and tell their story through his dancing.

There Came A Gypsy Riding
Frank McGuinness
1/11/07

The setting of this play is in Western Ireland, in a rural vacation spot outside of Dublin. There by the sea is a house used as a vacation cottage by the McKenna family. This house has been a place of celebration for the family, a place where they can get away from their work and stress and relax. But now it has become a place of mourning and anger because Eugene, one of the children, committed suicide a little ways down the beach from the cottage. He was found by Bridget, a distant cousin who plays an important role in this play. Bridget, like Feste in *Twelfth Night*, is a kind of wise fool, an old seemingly crazy woman who either is putting on a show of being crazy or has insightful moments. She can be seen as a witch or maybe a slightly confused fairy; in any case she may be in keeping with the Irish folklore tradition of a slightly questionable magical figure who helps others. At first she seems downright spiteful; she withholds Eugene's suicide not from the family for a few years, claiming that she wanted to wait until they were ready to handle it. The family is gathered for Eugene's 21st birthday and the night quickly becomes one of facing fears and communicating. Like Halloween night in *The Lightning Play*, this night becomes one in which the family members can air their grievances and finally come to terms with why Eugene decided to kill himself.

The mother is an English professor who specializes in Keates, a poet whose poetry became more inspired when he realized he was dying. His poem "Ode To a Nightingale" is quoted several times; it describes humans as being born for death, while nightingales are not. Eugene's note parallels this poem; he puts his birth date and date of death along with the birth dates of all his family members. Their dates of death are not on the note simply because they have not died yet. Eugene's note demonstrates what he believed; that they are all born for death, and he has just brought his about a little sooner than everyone else's. Margaret seems to speak to his spirit for a little while, telling him that she knows now that he was born for death, that he is her little bird. She knows that he believes in the curse of Adam, that we are "born to die." She realizes that he loved death and he married her. She blames herself partly for his death because in an interview for her job she said she had no children; that is why she imagines a child is perched on her should. It is her grief and guilt perched there, not her dead son.

Rather than seeing Eugene as brave for taking his own life when he wanted to, Eugene's sister Louise sees him as a coward, while at the same time is grateful for him for doing it instead of her. She is bitter that his note implies the whole family is in it together; his note has all of their names on it, and he seems to be saying that he just started something that they're all going to have to do eventually. She is incredibly angry with Eugene for hurting their family so bitterly and refuses to memorialize him in

positive ways. Just because he is dead doesn't mean that he became a better person; she knows that he stole money from his own mother and lied and drank too much and did drugs. She sees him as a quitter, as someone who did something spiteful because he didn't want to keep going. At the same time she is grateful that he committed suicide so that she didn't have to attempt it herself because she is not brave enough to do it.

Don Juan in Soho
By Patrick Marber
1/12/07

This modern retelling of Molière's story relates to the Faust story and to *The Seafarer*. It is a modern adaptation of a medieval Christian drama and is also very similar in plot to Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. In this play the hero is evil; Don Juan can be seen as a kind of Satan in a creation play, the first comic and villainous hero. Lucifer is always obsessed with his own beauty, and Don Juan definitely has a usurping ego. His desire is never satiated and he has a need for extras/sidekicks. Satan has other devils that play tricks for him, and Don Juan has his faithful sidekick Stan. Don Juan is a restless being, in constant search for pleasure and conquest.

Don Juan is similar to Faust because he can create worlds with their imaginations. Don Juan sees the world as he wants to see it, as an endless possibility for his intentions. He, also like Faust, is not completely lost until he makes a total commitment. Don Juan chooses his fate; he has been warned by the statue what will happen if he continues leading his life a certain way, and he decides to anyways. We cannot help but admire Don Juan in a way; he never recants his decisions and faithfully stands by his beliefs. He is unrelenting until the end and laughs at his own death. He points out the hypocrisy of a society which judges him as evil when it is itself a society of excess in which prostitutes and drug dealers abound.

He also believes that he is not hurting anyone by his actions, and we are made to question the idea that he does. Elvira, the virtuous woman he marries and supposedly hurts the greatest, confesses that he helped her discover her sexuality and overcome repression. She loves him and forgives him, which suggests that perhaps his actions aren't quite as evil as they are made out to be. He has a kind of untraditional integrity; he admires Elvira's pluck and wants her back while at the same time does not apologize for any of his actions. This idea of Satan as a hero is a popular idea started by Milton in *Paradise Lost*. Satan is the ultimate underdog and usually is a fascinating character; the good characters are boring and aren't as interesting as Satan.

Although the stage was small, it made the actors' entrances more exciting. They had to enter through the audience, making it seem as if the audience was a part of the action. It also was easier for the actors to speak directly to audience members when delivering lines. Stan especially was very good at addressing the audience directly, as a sort of appeal to a silent, judging chorus of people. Stan tries to get advice from the audience about what to do with his master whom he admires but hates at the same time. Stan's sole reason for not leaving Don Juan and going to work for someone else is that Don Juan owes him a large amount of money. Stan threatens/attempts to leave several times but Don Juan is very persuasive. As an audience we have to wonder whether Stan

is perhaps worse than Don Juan simply because he does not stick by his beliefs as Don Juan does. And he does Don Juan's dirty work even though he claims to hate it.

The statue which informs Don Juan of his impending doom is not actually death; Don Juan brings himself to his own death, indicative of his over-all self-destructive behavior throughout the play. In the end it is Don Juan who damns himself; he wants to live very badly but will not refute any of his beliefs or actions.

Spamalot

Book by Eric Idle

Music by John Du Prez

1/13/07

“We found the grail! It's beyond the fourth wall!” This line sums up the clever humor that characterizes Monty Python. This musical was amazingly funny and actually had a very good musical score. The acting technique is reminiscent of Brecht's idea of alienation. Actors acknowledge the audience's presence and at time comment on the fact that they are acting. The grail is finally found beneath an audience member's seat, after the “fourth wall” has been broken down completely. The Knights of Nee tell Arthur that in order to find the grail he must first put on a musical in the West End. The encore song involves the audience by having the words projected onto the stage so that the audience can sing along, and confetti falls from the ceiling at the end as a kind of mutual celebration. The Lady of the Lake sings, “Whatever Happened to My Part?” as an actress who is disappointed that her role turned out to be smaller than expected, and she and Galahad also sing a duet entitled, “In Every Show There is a Song That Goes Like This.” The creators of the show obviously wanted the actors to acknowledge the show as a show and not attempt to bring the audience to believe that what unfolds before them is real.

Spam itself is symbolic because it is not really a food. It is unidentifiable meat, an amalgamation of different pieces that form one substance. It is cheap, unhealthy, but easy to fix. It symbolizes everything that is wrong with today's society. Taste and health are sacrificed in the interest of time. Although we are “not dead yet,” we are quickly getting closer by being so irresponsible. This show is a huge enjoyment and is an incredibly entertaining and wonderfully silly masterpiece.