

## Student Responses—Theatre in England 2014

*To receive credit for the Theatre in England course, students complete either a journal (comprised of daily entries commenting on each play) or a take-home exam (comprised of questions asking students to draw thematic, theatrical, and production connections between plays). Below is a sampling of student responses from the 2014 trip.*

### ***Jack and the Beanstalk***

*Jack and the Beanstalk* was an interesting way to start this course, as it utilized a form of theatre not prevalent in the United States: pantomime, or panto for short. This form takes well-known folktales and stories and adds a sense of comedic irreverence to them, bending the famous stories to add in musicality, cross-dressing, humor, and many other theatrical—although not necessarily fancy—elements. Panto is also unmistakably participatory, an experience that is fairly unique in theatre.

Julia Sklar

With *Jack and the Beanstalk*'s almost nonexistent fourth wall, imagination was frequently invoked to make up for apparent budget limitations (Jill's climbing a rope to represent the beanstalk), and to both involve the audience in the action (the idea that the audience's urging to 'keep on sprouting' would give Sprout the strength to go on and to use his magical green thumb), while at the same time imagination could be reversed for comic effect (when Sprout reminds the trickster Fox that 'you're just a girl in a fox suit from Tesco!'). The panto reminds us at every turn that, while the actors enjoy their work, the production is for the benefit of the audience and not in service of a fantasy world with motivations particular to the characters; thus imagination brings us into their world, but is also frequently done away with for comic effect or for the benefit of audience participation.

Mark Patch

In *Jack and the Beanstalk* Sprout and Jack introduce the audience to a fanciful world where giants torture the town. The really imaginative part of the show comes in on the audience's interaction. The giant is almost never seen, and when he is it is only his face for a brief moment. This allows the audience to imagine him as significantly more frightening than he actually is by placing their own fears into him, thus making Jack's bravery all the more impressive. The audience's engagement allows the show to expand far beyond the normal boundaries of participation and helps pull the audience in. This allows the show to tailor to all the different ages that are watching. Children can imagine an ugly monster. Adolescents can start to comprehend that the monster may not be scary just because he is one ugly monster but because his existence suggests others and a whole world of frightening creatures. Adults will start to interpret the lack of a physical source of evil as the omnipresence of evil in this world. The level of engagement by imagination helps the audience imagine Jack's world not just as Jack's but as their own. Thus, the frightening elements of the giant carry over into the audience's real life by how engaged the audience is.

Kara Allen

*Jack and the Beanstalk* broke the fourth wall as the actors interacted with the audience, sometimes asking us to become involved physically as they did in *Stomp*, sometimes by literally bringing audience members up on stage. The character Maureen invited a University of Rochester student on stage to do Zumba together. Even after the student sat back down, Maureen continued to give this student humorously seductive looks and made reference to bringing that student back on stage several more times or made reference to looking good for that student.

This performance relied just as much on the audience as it did on the cast and the cast did well in reaching out to everybody to make this show successful; at some points the action from the audience was greater than that seen on stage as children threw their fists in the air supporting the protagonists and intimidating the villains. Throughout the panto, cast members asked the audience to “Boo!” at the villain Flesh-creep, or encourage Sprout by chanting, “Just keep sprouting!” The children in the audience progressively offered more of their cheers, boos, and words of wisdom without prompt; the audience naturally began to interact beyond instruction.

Sprout further engaged the children by tossing candy to the audience, sometimes aggressively with a tennis racket, mocking himself for smashing kids’ faces with candy moments after; the act of breaking character added an additional connection to the audience beyond the act of simply giving them candy.

Older audience members cheered and chanted alongside the younger ones, while slyly laughing at hidden adult humor. Continuing to break character, Sprout, who was making silly sexual references with a drum kit, murmured through his quiet giggles, “I can’t do this,” laughing at himself, mocking what he was doing as an actor because he was being so ridiculous. Adult audience members shared this moment of knowing laughter with him, interacting with him on a personal level. Breaking the illusion of theater, breaking the fourth wall, actually drew the more adult audience members, in particular, further into the production.

Breaking the fourth wall allowed the audience to become invested in both the characters’ success as well as the actors’ success. Pantos, by nature, contain elements that automatically break this wall as seen in the constant interactivity in *Jack and the Beanstalk*; the well-known plot was secondary to the anticipation of what antics the actors would perform next.

Molly Nemer

### ***Once a Catholic***

One of the first productions we witnessed in London was a play called *Once a Catholic*, a story of a Catholic school girl who struggles under the scrutiny of the teaching nuns at the school and other circumstantial hardships cast upon her. The protagonist, Mary Mooney, is initially introduced to the stage, standing in the center with a worried look on her face with nothing in the background but darkness. This quickly transitions into a classic classroom scene where Mary Mooney is constantly getting insulted by Mother Peter for being ignorant. But the trial does not stop there for Mary Mooney as she continues to endure being picked on by her classmates, being sexually assaulted by her classmate's boyfriend, and being physically abused from the nuns in the Catholic school for blatantly unreasonable causes. But despite all these hardships endured by Mary Mooney, her character itself does not go through as much change as one would expect. She is initially type-cast as the innocent oblivious girl, and she never quite outgrows that oblivious self despite that fact that she learns of many new topics in life—especially ones regarding human sexuality. Rather, her innocence is especially strongly portrayed in a later scene where Mary

Mooney informs Mother Thomas that she wants to remain in Catholic school in order to become a nun herself. This surprising statement supported by the mental resilience of Mary Mooney seemed to capture the heart of Mother Thomas to the point that she is on the verge of tears, especially so in her case since Mother Thomas had just consulted the brash Mary McGinty. In this way, it was observable that Mary Mooney's actions and endurance caused others to change around her, such as the reactions of Mother Thomas or the engagement of her friend, Mary McGinty and Derek the sexual assaulter.

Yuji Wakimoto

*Once a Catholic* accentuates its theatricality to serve a twofold purpose. First, the show aims to demonstrate the theatrical nature of the Catholic Church itself in emphasizing its rigid, ritualized structure. Similarly to a staged performance, members of the faith like Mary Mooney, Mary Gallagher, and Mary McGintey must recite lines and engage in certain tasks on cue. They must not deviate from the “script” outlined by the Bible and its enforcers (i.e., the nuns), lest they risk chastisement and scorn. Mary Mooney’s risqué questions depict such a deviation that results in derision from the nuns. Second, both the clergy and laypeople in *Once a Catholic* view life as a performance and God as the most significant audience member. The girls struggle to reconcile their predominantly sexual urges with an equally overwhelming desire to live a life deemed acceptable by God, thereby inducing guilt and self-consciousness. The audience, along with the schoolgirls, experiences a sort of role confusion as it tries to determine its status as the observer versus the observed in the story. Mother Peter’s pointed monologue addressed to the audience, combined with the audience’s view of the girls’ backs when seated in the classroom, gives rise to the feeling of scrutiny within the audience.

Grace Lisandrelli

In what might be considered the most restrained form of fourth wall violation [that we saw on the trip], *Once a Catholic* barely invites the audience into the action or invades their space; none of the characters display any knowledge that they are being observed, they do not make direct addresses or soliloquies that are explicitly for the audience’s benefit, and all of the characters’ motivations and the action onstage are entirely self-contained within the world of the play. When roll call is taken, we imagine we are only seeing the first row of students, and we may imagine that the various unseen Marys exist within the space of the audience; and later, when the schoolmistress nun stands on the edge of the stage and addresses the crowd, she may be seen as speaking more or less directly to the audience. But it is equally possible to see her facing the audience on the edge of the stage as using the audience as living props, for while we may be part of the crowd she is addressing, she is explicitly addressing the assembly of schoolgirls within the play. Thus we are only ever on the cusp of the play’s action, and our involvement is almost nominal. The audience address at the end plays on the feelings of guilt and chastisement that pervade the rest of the production, attempting to draw us in further to the tormented souls of the girls.

Mark Patch

## *American Psycho*

*American Psycho* called on the audience to decide what was reality and what was fantasy. The lead character, Patrick Bateman, is a man struggling with not being seen (a theme we also saw in *Blink*), and being unable to connect with the people around him. [Because of this lack of connection, he resorts – or so it appears – to committing murders that become more and more visceral and violent.] In his world of aggressive businessmen and superficial, ambitious women he is entirely taken by the practice of perfecting his appearance because this is the only impression he is capable of making on others. This perfection of presentation is demonstrated by the fixation on business cards in one of the early numbers of the show. The intriguing ending of the show, at which point the audience is left to wonder if the murders actually happened, is built up to through use of the style and set of the show as taken from the script. The main character frequently says he needs to return videos the nights that he commits the murders. To emphasize the apparent importance of this statement and the fantastic quality of the show there was a large collection of video tapes lining the walls of the set, and the stage floor itself was even built as two giant rotating rings like those of a video tape. The murders were the main character's only way of fighting his environment, as it was only when he was literally inside other people [i.e., disemboweling them] that he was able to feel connected to them. Though he denies having empathy, it is empathy that makes him force the secretary away so as not to kill her. In the end, he makes no impact on his environment, which is demonstrated by the total cover-up of his final murder.

Sophia Catalano

*American Psycho*'s set was austere and sterile, representing Patrick Bateman's own obsession with cleanliness and a sleek aesthetic. This sterility was the result of an extremely conservative color palette composed almost entirely of whites, blacks and blues combined with a soft-lighting scheme and minimal props. The starkness of the set created a harsh contrast against the bright, lurid projections which became more prevalent towards the end of the play. Two reels on either side of the stage constantly carried characters and props through Bateman's life but rarely ever stopped, showing how easily he moved through life without forming any strong emotional connections to others. Interestingly enough the reels also caused the stage to look like a VHS tape, symbolizing both Bateman's obsessions with horror films but also alluding to the possibility that the action shown might not be as real as the audience perceives. A major aspect of the *American Psycho* staging was the use of projections, which increased in frequency and severity as Patrick Bateman sunk further into his own insanity. These projections were often crude and disturbing, allowing the audience to see into Bateman's violent psyche. However, the projections didn't exist for any character except for Bateman and the audience, when we were allowed to see them. By replacing real stage blood with projected blood *American Psycho* stays true to its message of psychopathic violence hidden by a clean exterior, and alludes towards the possibility that Patrick Bateman imagined the murders that he believed he committed. The projections allowed the stage to be simultaneously a pristine bedroom and a blood-soaked horror scene layered on top of each other -- a perfect metaphor for the flawed mind of Patrick Bateman.

Steven Winkelman

In *American Psycho*, Patrick Bateman indicts capitalism directly in his final song "This is Not an Exit" in which he sings, "Maybe this schism is just a symptom of late capitalism." The

word 'schism' could refer to multiple aspects of the musical. First, there is the divide between *American Psycho's* businessmen (and women) and the less privileged characters such as Jean and the homeless person. The financial separation between these groups fosters the derision that incites Bateman to his first murder. When he interacts with the homeless man, Bateman berates him for his lack of initiative and laziness, attributing his homelessness to a lack of hard work. This scene and the following murder comment on the violence and metaphorical cannibalism of a capitalistic system.

Second, there is also a schism between Patrick Bateman and the rest of the world, including his privileged friends. He tries to communicate with his companions, but they seem to mishear him. For example, when Bateman mentions that he works in “murders and executions,” the woman hears “mergers and acquisitions.” He also confesses his crimes to the detective, who then interprets his voicemail as a joke. He even tells Evelyn repeatedly that he is a murderer and wants to behead her. Creating a division between Bateman and his society acknowledges another negative aspect of capitalism – its ability not only to tear apart different socio-economic groups but also to divide within those groups. In addition, Paul Owen's character strengthens this in-group division because of the imagined competition he presents to Bateman as a fellow wealthy businessman.

A third schism that capitalism presents in *American Psycho* is a split *within* Patrick Bateman. Is he a murderer or simply one who fantasizes about murder? Is he actually saying “murders and executions” or is he so divorced from reality that he imagines it? This schism between Bateman's sense of reality and his psychosis is symbolized by the leave and reappearance of Tim Price. In the beginning of the musical, Tim Price is only ever present when Bateman is on stage and is often alone with him in places like cabs and bathrooms, attempting to improve Bateman's behavior like a conscience would. When Price dramatically leaves, Bateman begins his murders, but when Price returns Bateman realizes that they all might be in his imagination. In this way, the split between reality and Bateman's psychosis can be simplified to Price and Bateman. After all, Bateman does say in the final song that he doesn't exist. Maybe he's just part of Price, or vice versa. Again, the blame for this intra-person schism is directly assigned to capitalism in the final song, “This is Not an Exit.” The pressure of living in a capitalistic society divides the poor and rich, the rich among themselves, and the rich as individuals. To quote Bateman: “In the end, no one is safe. Nothing is redeemed. And yet, I am blameless as I come face to face with the truth. A truth.” No one is free from capitalism according to *American Psycho*. The individual cannot escape the system and, as a result, is blameless when confronted with its devastating effects.

Katherine Briant

### ***The Mystery of Irma Vep***

*The Mystery of Irma Vep*, a Victorian “alternative panto” two-man show played in an intimate performance space, theatrically mocked sexuality and gender by cross dressing and doubling of characters (having two men play ten characters) between genders and even between species, such as humans vs. werewolves. It had us questioning whether or not one can have more than one gender identity. I constantly found myself laughing at their mishaps, quick costume changes, and stage transitions. The production required an active imagination to take it straight without losing focus into the play, to take seriously the different (contrasted) types of love. The

two men took cross dressing seriously, and hence I was actively invested in their choices. To have the same person clearly playing two different genders, even two different species, in a matter of minutes, was hilarious to watch. Even the actors, when playing Lord Edgar and Lady Enid, had a difficult time taking seriously their onstage “love.” For example, Lady Enid would be accompanied by an emotional housemaid who would then exit and re-enter the stage within minutes as Lord Edgar, Lady Enid’s lover. Of course, there was only room for two beings onstage at once. At one point in the play, one of the characters even said to the other something like “so bring him onstage!” to which the other responded “I can’t...” which was also a sort of “breaking of the fourth wall” with the audience. The play is also a satire, a clever mocking, a melodramatic farce of several literary genres and particular works. For example, it both deconstructs and celebrates the horror genre with use vampires, werewolves, mummies, and ghosts.

Allison Saba

In *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, where two actors play between them ten roles of both genders, the fourth wall is broken in order to invite the audience to participate in the farcical humor of the show. The actors’ repeated glances at the audience, particularly after jokes about how they are seeing the same actors over and over again in outlandish costumes, serve as a reminder that the show recognizes its own comedy. This recognition of the absurdity of the play, such as when Lady Enid laughs coyly at the audience after Jane points out that she cannot speak to Nicodemus “for obvious reasons,” keeps the ridiculous elements of the play from straying from funny and engaging into frustrating. To take this comedy too seriously would be to rob it of its power to be funny, so the actors repeatedly remind the audience of the obvious fact that they are indeed meant to be seen as actors first and characters second, thereby capitalizing on the effects of live theatre by playing up blatant artifice.

Taylor McCabe

As two male actors played multiple male and female roles in *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, the audience was required to use our imagination to turn a campy and intentionally crudely executed production into one of believability. The actors had to take their roles seriously but not treat them as high art. They had quick costume changes, completely transforming characters in a moment’s time, requiring the audience to work a little to imagine the interactions as seamless. While the actors were working hard to keep up with the script, the audience easily recognized the obstacles the actors had to overcome. The suspense of wondering if the actors could make it on stage for their next character’s line added great suspense and joy to the performance but it also forced us to use our imagination to remember what we were watching was more than a demanding game of hurdles.

As the same actors played many roles, the audience had to make sure our literal vision and recognition of the two actors did not stunt our interpretation of what we saw. We had to see beyond the recognizable faces and buy into who the characters were telling us they were. When Nicodemus became a werewolf by sticking his hand behind a wall and pulling it back out covered in a fuzzy glove with claws attached, the audience had to accept his transformation as the truth, even though we knew he had just stuck his hand in a glove.

It was a greater stretch to believe that Nicodemus could have a conversation with Lady Enid while they were both in the same room as the same actor played both roles, but these moments provided humor that added charm to the production. This charm is what motivated and

inspired me to use my imagination to better immerse myself into the believability of this production.

Molly Nemer

### *Fault Lines*

The play restricts its scope of focus to a British organization called Disasters Relief, in the aftermath of a traumatic event in Pakistan, to make a poignant observation about the paradoxically cutthroat nature of global aid organizations. The members of Disasters Relief, with Pat at the helm, rush to provide assistance to Pakistan in advance of their competitors. The members come to view the tragedy as a means by which to promote the organization, a thinking style that results in rather deleterious outcomes. The more pressing desire for fame and recognition in many ways trumps the desire for goodwill towards the Pakistani people.

Grace Lisandrelli

The audience viewing *Fault Lines* was thrown into the chaos that characterized the performance. Upon entering the theater, audience members stepped into what appeared to be an office, covered with evidence of a reckless and drunken holiday work party. The mess foreshadowed a more macro mess soon to manifest itself.

The performance opened with Abi emerging from a relief supply tent in which she had spent the night with Nick. She rediscovered the chaotic mess just as the audience was still absorbing it, together processing the effects of the previous night. The audience was literally thrown into the disordered office, sitting alongside the characters in this crazy cluttered environment, inserted into the story as it was born and as it unraveled.

The set transformed the entire theater into a working office, every space in use. Actors walked past the audience into personal office spaces in the theater's walls, doors closed so the action unfolded through half-opened blinds. The characters continued acting in those rooms whether the audience had the capability to clearly see their actions or not. The setting lent itself to realistic encounters, interactions, and conflict that extended beyond the physical space. This design contributed to a very naturalistic portrayal that allowed the characters to transform from actors to real people in whom the audience became invested.

With the frenzy of activities taking place throughout the room, the audience members could choose which of these specific characters and actions on which to aim their focus. Characters, too, were able to choose what they wanted to see; in this performance, characters chose to turn a blind eye to the moral truth. Nick chose to help Abi create false truths, false data reports, to hide highly unfortunate work-related oversights. The characters chose to look past the reality of Abi's mistake and focus on saving their jobs, ignoring the well-being of their organization, of their boss, and more importantly of the Pakistani people.

Due to the nature of the set, neither the audience nor the characters were able to see the entirety of events unfolding. When viewpoint came into play as obstructions blocked computer screens and desks, the audience observed truths not apparent to the characters.

The audience was both a physical part of the mess but also a mere fly on the wall, invested in the problems that seemed so real but without the agency to respond. The symbolic passage of time escalated the intensity of the problem; the room darkened as a digital clock

speedily flashed changing numbers, symbolizing the looming threat to the characters and providing a source of tension for the audience.

Integral to the set through bleacher-like seating, the audience symbolized a threatening presence to the characters on another level. The audience reflected the role of the public and the press, constantly watching and criticizing and scrutinizing organizations like “Disaster Relief.”

Molly Nemer

*Fault Lines* takes a novel approach in portraying the helplessness of individuals. In such a small performance space, the viewer quickly become acquainted with the characters in a very intimate fashion, particularly with Abi, a main character who is almost naked in Scene One. The lack of curtains and the use of seating in a round let the audience observe very intricate details about the characters’ habits and lives. Nothing can be hidden, not even what they are typing on the computer. However, the main source of conflict, the terrorists in Pakistan and the natural disasters, occur in the space beyond what the audience can see. We maintain glimpses through the television screen or one-sided phone calls, but the majority of it is completely hidden from view. The removal of this conflict creates a profound sense of helplessness within the characters, as we witness them trying to combat a kind of invisible force. Our imaginations allow us to interpret the source of conflict in a powerful and unstoppable environment. The characters within the office become trapped by it, forced to run around in circles without really removing or combating any of this ‘invisible’ force. It becomes an unsettling experience, making the characters appear as small individuals, helpless to change something that they cannot even see in the first place.

Elizabeth Riedman

### ***Drawing the Line***

In *Drawing The Line*, the main character, Radcliffe, has to draw the border between India and the new nation of Pakistan. This impossible task is one that Radcliffe tries his best to remain impartial at, though there are Muslim supporters and Hindu supporters trying to sway his opinion. The political figures of India and Pakistan represent their people, the British viceroy represents the British government, and Radcliffe represents fairness and equality. At the end of the play, the viceroy’s wife asks him to push for a better Indian border, because she is having an affair with the Indian representative. The viceroy then asks Radcliffe to support India, though at first Radcliffe declines. Eventually he is persuaded and we see the true nature of equality. Those who make decisions for the world do not always desire what is best for it. The viceroy just wanted his wife to care about him the way she used to, so he made a decision based on personal interest. This forced Radcliffe to sway the border in India’s favor, because if he didn’t the British government would know something wasn’t right. The end of the play presented us with a large fiery outline of the border that Radcliffe drew, signifying the danger that this unfair border created.

Dan Slavin

Though it didn’t incorporate the audience into the set in the same degree that *Fault Lines* did, *Drawing the Line* had an equally symbolic set. Covered almost entirely in gray curtains at the top of the show to evoke dreary colonial Britain, the set was then revealed to be an elaborate

cream colored latticework cage-like structure. The latticework served as a number of symbols throughout the play. First, it was composed of symbols specific to the two major religions in India at the time, Hinduism and Islam. Even if one wasn't close enough to see the specific religious symbolism in the set, the interwoven latticework clearly represents the hope at the time for a united, or at least peaceful, solution to the issue of partition. All the actors used the same space, with minimal movements of furniture and props to suggest different areas, for their interactions, strengthening the idea that the set represents one India. The set did, however, have a darker side. The doors were all but invisible when closed, and at times the set felt like a cage. This helped to emphasize Radcliffe's escalating sense of futility and helplessness as the conflict heated and he was pressured to make a decision. Lastly, the set at the end of the play was lit from behind by a giant flame, no doubt foreshadowing the bloody conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and other contested areas.

Kat McCorkle

The latticework set of *Drawing the Line* was absolutely amazing. It was beautiful on its own, and seeing all of the Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh symbols it was individually made up of was wonderful symbolism for the India-Pakistan area having pockets of each religion everywhere and being in harmony as a whole. The fact that there were never any dividers set up on stage also showcases its harmony. The fire appearing behind the set and dividing the lattice in two with no regard for the whole structure was also a wonderful design choice, representing the biased and pretty much random line between the two countries. But my favorite use of the lattice was much more subtle. There were three scenes set in England, far away from the struggle and intricacy of the subcontinent. The English were the ones making the decisions with no knowledge of how it would affect the harmony of the area. During every scene set in England the complex lattice wasn't visible. During the very first scene with Radcliffe accepting his charge and telling his wife, the lattice was covered with a black curtain. When Radcliffe called home, stage left went dark, and hid the lattice from view. Finally, during the last scene with all the main players onstage, Radcliffe and his wife were in front of the open center-stage door, showing only blackness behind them; however, Radcliffe was no longer entirely unaffected, so the lattice surrounded him on all sides. This represents just how little the English could see of the situation, and highlights how idiotic it was to have them calling all the shots.

Lindsey Nadler

### ***From Morning to Midnight***

*From Morning to Midnight* represents the detrimental side to imagination. The play chronicles a bank clerk's quest to derive meaning from a meaningless life by way of a series of fantastical events that are likely a product of his psyche. In his pursuit, he forsakes all ties to reality, including his family and profession, in favor of a world of illusion. The storyline relies exclusively on the imagination of both the clerk partaking in and the audience watching the events unfolding onstage. The clerk's imagination allows for the genesis of the events. The plot itself starts with the clerk stealing a large sum of money from the bank for which he works, an act precipitated by a seemingly imaginary lust-filled exchange with a beautiful female customer. From then on in, the story treads the line between reality and fantasy. Audience members' imaginations, then, run rampant as they try to decipher the thematic elements underscoring the

piece. In addition, the play's driving force, money, remains invisible (or "imaginary") throughout, allowing the audience to focus on effect and overall concept rather than cause. The scene during which the characters confess "their" sins at a Salvation Army meeting suggests that each of the clerk's attempts to find meaning through fantasy as displayed in vignettes over the course of the play has proven futile and will lead to his ultimate demise. *From Morning to Midnight* espouses the idea that not even one's imagination can provide solace from one's hollow existence.

Grace Lisandrelli

The initial symbolism of the common man (The Clerk) attempting to escape from the oppressive machine of society is depicted through a literal clockwork machine set in the opening scene. The continued dismantling and reusing of the initial "machine" serves to remind the audience that the clerk is still living within its confines, no matter how hard he tries to flee. Each transition is natural and fluid; the characters tell a story through scene changes. This fluidity also shows that background characters can get trapped or drawn in by the destruction of the Clerk's own world. For example, a character was trapped in a rising doorway during a transition and stayed perched above the stage until the doorway was taken down. A more obvious example would be the collapse of the family doorway after the Clerk leaves his home, representing the destruction of both his family and his home through his crime. It was also interesting that the Clerk's money, which was his only tool for communicating with others, was never shown on stage. The fact that this money only existed as a symbol seemed to strengthen its importance. To the characters that the Clerk came upon, the money glowed and shined, causing them to do terrible things and shaping their world but never taking tangible form. By not showing the money, *From Morning to Midnight* effectively changed 60,000 francs into a symbol of pure unlabeled desire. A hugely symbolic staging device in *From Morning to Midnight* was the use of the personal camera projection, first when the woman from Florence touches the Clerk's hand and finally in the Salvation Army scene. The use of the personal camera allowed the audience to see the world through the eyes of the clerk and helped us to understand the filters that led to his folly; the intense focus on the woman's hand, the shaky panic when viewing the confessions of his fellow sinners. This technique highlighted the scenes which severed the Clerk from the machine and was used when he was at his most emotionally invested; first when the woman gave him the emphasis to break free and then when the sinners gave him an offer of forgiveness for his crimes, and a chance at peace.

Steven Winkelman

The set of *From Morning to Midnight* was especially intriguing because of the way it interacted with the actors. During "The Machine," the actors were just as much a part of the machine as the set was, and that showed how smoothly and quickly everything was running. The thing which threw a wrench in the works, the Florentine mother, was shown to not quite fit in the machine by attempting to spin the turnstile the wrong way and by giving the clerk her information incorrectly, even before he heard her story and attempted to leave his place of work with the marks. The person who broke the machine didn't fit in it in the first place. A different piece of the set that drew a lot of attention was the large metal framework that debuted in the second half. It was there the entire time, and I remember thinking in the first half that the back of the stage looked strange, but I passed it off as part of the existential, symbolic nature of the play. When the curtain opened on the second half of the play, and I saw the frame closer to the

audience, I was very impressed. I think it represented time and death. It was where the clock was first projected and was is where the “Death” character came from the first and last time we saw it. It was constantly looming over the stage, the actors, and most of the audience. Finally, it was where the clerk died. His death had been close by the entire play, whether he realized it or not.

Lindsey Nadler

### *Swan Lake*

It was interesting to see this adaptation of *Swan Lake* on the same day as *From Morning to Midnight* because this ballet also operated on a highly symbolic level and also played with identity. Ordinarily, the case of *Swan Lake* consists largely of women—Odette, the princess, for starters, and all of the supporting swans. In this adaptation, however, the cast was largely men, which added a more aggressive perspective to what is usually thought of as a particularly graceful and feminine ballet. This isn’t necessarily out of keeping with the plot, however, as swans present that front in real life. From the outside they seem beautiful, graceful, and feminine, but they are actually some of the most brutally fierce and aggressive birds out there. So, while the use of men in these roles is atypical, it perhaps actually supports the dual nature of a swan better.

This duality is also present in this particular interpretation about whether the black swan is another aspect of the prince himself, or rather the prince’s lover. In this sense, *Swan Lake* also fits the bill as another performance that plays with identity and with representing the different layers within one character in such a way that reality is bent a little, and we’re not sure whether to take certain characterizations as symbolic or real.

Interestingly enough, although this classic show is a ballet, this particular interpretation actually strayed quite far from that niche. The only classical ballet that appears onstage is during the show-within-a-show that occurs when the prince and the girl in pink attend a show. The rest of the actual show actually incorporated many different types of dance form and not once where any of them on pointe.

The way the dancers interacted with the set worked to inform the plot further, in particular the scene that made use of shadows. Here we see the prince’s mother’s shadow against a wall, making her larger than life, as the prince cowers in the corner, depicted as quite small. This symbolically represents his role in the story; despite that the story is so inherently about him, he is able to take very little agency over what is happening. Between his mother dictating where he goes, who he sees, and when he comes home and the swan playing devil’s advocate against these restrictions, the prince is caught in between and begins to lose sight of himself. Ultimately, we see him depicted as a swan himself. Interestingly enough, because of this particular adaptation’s stretch of the original story, this metamorphosis can either be interpreted as the prince finding his true self, or fully losing himself.

Julia Sklar

*Swan Lake* presented us with an example of how imagination can be destructive. In this particular production, the prince character who resides in the real physical world seemingly imagines a male swan character whom he relies on as a source of peace and comfort. In the scenes where the male swan character is a white swan, the positive effects of the fantasy are evident; the prince is able to recover from his depressive state from the club scene by vigorously

dancing and engaging the white swan at the lake, and in the final scenes the white swan is seen as a rescuing figure while the prince is being attacked by the other swans. However, the destructive elements of the imaginings take form in the black swan, who elegantly appeared in the ballroom dance scene. One common characteristic of the destructive fantasy is that the destruction happened once the fantasy became a tangible element to the real world as the black swan is seen to be interacting and dancing together not just with the prince, but the other characters present in the ball as well. It was only after following this scene where the prince became truly distraught and devastated once again from his jealousy felt towards the black swan for possibly both cheating on the prince himself and for seducing the prince's mother. The destructive effect of this tangible imagining was so great, that the audience observed how the prince approached his death bed as the performance progressed.

Yuji Wakimoto

A case of imagination fully realized and truly run amok is observed in *Swan Lake*, where Matthew Bourne has the Prince, in an effort to escape a rote, daily routine, dream of literally soaring away from his problems into the primal body of a swan. Unfortunately his fantastic dream about connection with a swan infects his reality, as we see in his reaction to the similar looking guest at the ball he attends upon returning to his palace; he cannot understand why his beloved swan suddenly acts in such an aggressive and lascivious manner, yet he is still powerfully drawn to him and attempts to confront or reconcile with the guest, with deadly consequences. Indeed, by the end of the play, the prince's imagination has gone from a roborative tool for finding meaning in his life to a shackle, as he struggles to purge his visions of swans from his tortured mind in a mental asylum or prison. The final scene has him fighting the pack of supporting swans (perhaps those forces in his life that worked to reject his love/connection with the lead swan?) in defense of his beloved, and though the struggle proves fatal for both, we are left with the image of a fantasy made manifest in death, as he is carried away in the arms of the white swan. For the Prince, imagination proved all too real.

Mark Patch

### *The Elephantom*

Often left alone by her parents, a young girl develops an elephant-ghost companion. When he grows too large and becomes a problem, she finds a way to tame him. The play can be taken as a representation of how imagination can help and harm. During her loneliness, her fantasy is a source of companionship and fun, but it easily gets out of hand. When out of control, her imagination wrecks her surroundings.

Katherine Briant

*Elephantom* is a children's show that uses music, rhythmic movement, and non-verbal vocal sounds to emote. These techniques are used because *Elephantom* is a children's show for all ages. Words often can be confusing to children and adults look for deeper meanings and subtexts in words. If a story does not use words, these are nonissues. Also the use of rhythmic movement as a language is more engaging because movement stimulates the brain in a way that words alone do not, and it requires more active viewing. Additionally, the music creates an atmosphere that helps portray emotions and storytelling, even if it is not in the forefront of the

viewer's mind. The music in *Elephantom* used many instruments for different moments in the play. The use of drums showed the hecticness that the phantom elephant created. The musicians even sang two songs a cappella, imitating a bass and trumpets with their voices. This represented the elephant's trunk sound and footsteps. All of these techniques allow the viewer to be engaged in the story, no matter what age they are.

Dan Slavin

Collins's *The Elephantom* used nonverbal language to represent a potential shortcoming of words in a children's production -- that words may not get through to a youthful audience as effectively as a sensory (visual/auditory) storytelling might. Use of compensatory elements such as exaggerated facial expressions and body language, verbal noises/ gibberish, instrumental music, household percussion sounds, and extraordinary puppetry are some of the theatrically clever ways that director Finn Caldwell chose to tell a story and convey an inspirational message to us without the need for verbal expressions. Exaggerated facial expressions and body language helped children to mentally grasp the emotions and inner workings of the characters onstage. While children witnessed the fantastic imagination of the little girl and felt her struggles with the elephantom (as well as parallels within the grandmother), adults experienced another dynamic that sort of "spoke" to them. For example, adults found the struggles with the elephantom comedic or melodramatic, while kids may have found it scary and daunting. In addition, adults may have noticed the sexual, playful tension between the parents, a unique language that was meant for adults specifically. The two different levels of this production, meant to reach two different audiences in two different ways, was a strategy that was similarly used in the panto we saw.

Use of verbal noises and gibberish in *Elephantom* existed to imply the dialogue that was absent in this production and help the audience comprehend the story. For example, the mother's use of gibberish and "uh-huh's" on the phone allowed us to imagine there was actually another person present on the other line, which otherwise would have been awkward and confusing. Another example was when the elephantom caused wreckage in the home and we heard the characters go "whoa", "oh!" and "ah" when they and their objects were being shoved around. With no verbal mutters to express themselves, their movements would have been strange.

There was a situational contrast of instrumental music in this production which also served as a type of nonverbal language. In normally-functioning, everyday family/household scenes, the music was bouncy, happy-hearted, content, and sometimes comedic. However, in the scenes with the haunting elephantom and the ghost-hunting, the use of dissonance, flat tones, and "darker" and mystic-sounding sequences of notes were all used to set the mood and to convey the emotions that spoken language could not; to draw us into the mental world of this little girl--some weird, ambiguous, lingering, dream-like fantasy state. When the elephantom appeared, often there was a kind of circus elephant, trumpeting, humongous-sounding, bold series of notes played by a tuba to suggest its "big" presence. Percussion sounds, made by drumming on household items, had a similar effect on the audience: it was another compensatory element for the lack of words.

Allison Saba

## *The Wind in the Willows*

*The production of The Wind in the Willows that we saw was based upon Kenneth Grahame's classic 1908 children's book and featured a "Kenneth Grahame" character/narrator as well as actors dressed in 1900's clothing with minimal details (e.g. ears and tails) indicating their animal identities.*

The main characters in *The Wind in the Willows* do not talk throughout the play. The animals are silent unless they are part of the musical components of the play, and instead of words they rely on movement and ballet-like dancing to construct the narrative and move the story forward. The only character that is heard talking consistently throughout the play is the narrating figure, who also happens to be the only human character in the play. The audience rarely ever sees this narrating figure moving actively and dancing like the other characters, but instead he is the only one responsible for using words to influence the narrative of the play. The individual scenes are played out through the movements of the animals, and the transitions between the scenes are often controlled through the vocal narrations. This does not mean that the narrations are only satisfying a story-telling role, but rather the play employs poetic elements within the narration that complement the ballet-like dances and enrich the overall production.

Yuji Wakimoto

Sometimes words can serve to limit the experience that one may see. In *The Wind in the Willows*, the words served no other point than to progress the plot along through the aid of the narrator. However, as the actions themselves were already unfolding on stage through the characters' dance and pantomime, the words themselves were not necessarily needed. In this fashion, they only served to detract from the spectacle that may have been experienced had the viewer been forced to focus more intently on the production. The viewer attenuated their focus to only what was being described and did not progress out of the bonds of what was being discussed. In more sophisticated language there are often hidden meanings to account for such a discourse, but in the basic narration for this child's play, the act was limited.

Danny Mensel

*The Wind in The Willows*, which like *Elephantom* was targeted towards children and had a largely non-speaking cast, faltered precisely because of their decision to add direct narration towards the audience. This narration only made the audience aware that dialogue was possible, and prevented the possible significance of any character's non-verbal dialogue. It also changed the world from that of a child to that of a child being spoken down to by an adult, which largely ruined the magic of *The Wind in The Willows*. *Elephantom* effectively created, dressed, destroyed and saved a very real universe without uttering a single eligible word by showing us the action, and not telling us what to see. As the experts say: Show, don't tell.

Steven Winkelman

## *Henry V*

Even within a portfolio of scripts that contain some of the most powerful and evocative language ever put to paper, Shakespeare's *Henry V* stands out as a tour-de-force. We may consider both the language of the play itself: rich, momentous, dynamic, and full of life; and the way the plot and players are moved by their own and others' language. The action begins with a war brought on by the shortcomings of language in settling a dispute between princes [the conflicts leading up to and including the Battle of Agincourt during the Hundred Years' War]; Henry and the Dauphin are unable to talk their difficulties out, and instead insults are thrown back and forth, despite Henry's original profession that he does not seek war. Throughout the play, we see misunderstandings lead to altercations, all brought on by intentional or unintentional problems of communication, as with Henry's ruse with the Welsh soldier and later Pistol's challenges to more Welshmen (perhaps a knowing wink to the audience is present here, who may have had a stereotype about the Welsh being hard to understand—as indeed their language is completely separate from English). But *Henry V* is famous for its depiction of the immense power of language, as twice during the action, King Henry rallies his outnumbered and exhausted troops with rousing calls to arms. We see in these speeches how, at least within the action of the play, a good speech seems to be worth 20,000 men; and indeed, since Shakespeare gives essentially no indication of the important technological and strategic elements that were crucial in Agincourt, the St. Crispin's Day speech is depicted as the principle cause of Henry's success. Finally we see the Chorus/Boy using language to overcome the shortcomings of a stage production in depicting war on a grand scale, and he literally instructs the audience to imagine what is *said* on stage actually exists.

Mark Patch

*Henry V* broke the fourth wall by dressing the Chorus in modern clothes and having him lie on stage and read the play during the interval. When considered with the decision to double-cast the chorus as the Boy, this choice directly connects the viewers to the play. Not only do we look like the Chorus in our manner of dress, but most of us have read *Henry V* or other plays by Shakespeare before. We can relate to him as he reads on stage. This sense of connection transfers to when he is surrounded by soldiers as the Boy, making the audience feel more immersed in the battle. The play also broke the fourth wall when Henry gave his most powerful speeches facing the audience. In that moment, it is easy to feel as though the king is rallying *you* as well as the troops.

Katherine Briant

*Henry V* is a play with truly stirring political rhetoric. In direct contrast to his famous "Once more unto the breach, dear friends" and the Crispin's Day speech, Henry's encounter with the French princess Katharine is almost awkwardly funny. Instead of delivering a romantic, eloquent love speech as Shakespeare is wont to write, or a rallying storm of rhetoric like Henry does earlier in the play, Henry resorts to almost childish, bashful humor in attempts to woo Katharine. This contrast between Henry's battlefield speeches and his conversation with Katharine helps to develop Henry's character, from the wild prince he is described as in *Henry IV* as well as in the beginning of the play, to an inspiring monarch who also is able to laugh at himself (albeit for matters of state). Not only does it help to further develop and humanize

Henry, the mutability of language in the play serves to illustrate the changing and popular nature of politics. A king or other politician can be charismatic, witty, or imposing as it suits him.

Kat McCorkle

### *Richard II*

Richard is an absolute monarch who believes himself to be ordained by God, but realizes slowly that he is subject to the march of time and political changes just as his subjects are. In the end, Richard is only a man who faces changes in the political system that end up being too powerful for him to oppose. Henry Bolingbroke, Richard's adversary, is backed by the English populace while Richard's backing from God seems to fail him. The imagery displayed in the play's set, lighting, and costuming choices helped to emphasize the transition in governance the play explores, that of one from absolute divine monarchs to a government headed by a king with the support from the general public. Richard's costumes first echoed the sun or an opulent, godlike figure. Towards the end of the play, he is barefoot and clad in white, evoking a Christ figure. In contrast to Richard's overly tragic and theatrical costuming, Bolingbroke remains in essentially the same practical suit of mail until he is crowned king.

Kat McCorkle

*Richard II* powerfully suggests the helplessness of an individual, as the plot slowly strips King Richard of his divine right, removing him from symbolic head of a country to a weak individual. In the first act, the elaborate costumes, golden crown and raised set highlight how Richard acts as head of a larger political system. The use of symbolic colors within his costume portrays his connection with his country. He is also rarely without a collection of advisors and men around him, symbolizing his oneness with the group. However, after his loss of power, his costume changes from rich blues to a simple white gown. He appears on stage more often by himself and even his language changes from the royal "we" to "myself". These factors suggest his removal from the collective to an individual, particularly as Bolingbroke begins to take on Richard's old identity as symbolic leader. By the end of the play, one can barely recognize the same King who spoke so powerfully in the first act. The silent presence of his murdered body quite literally represents a death by the collective, as Richard has moved from a powerful symbolic head to an unrecognizable individual to simply a dead body.

Elizabeth Riedman

*Richard II* addresses the question of convention and innovation, positing it more as the question of history or progress. The fall of Richard, mirrored by his entrances from increasingly low points of the stage, ending with his coming up from below the stage itself, is the inevitable, if tragic, movement of progress. Though Richard is a pitiable figure, when held in comparison to Henry Bolingbroke, later Henry IV, he is old fashioned and out of touch with his people. It is the old world idea that he is a king by divine right rather than by political savvy that leads Richard to arrogance as he toys with Bolingbroke and Mowbray, forcing them to go through the elaborate introductions of their duel before interrupting and banishing them both. This reckless belief in his power is the catalyst for the chain of events that leads to Richard being overthrown and killed. Particularly from a modern perspective, this march away from divinely ordained kings towards political ones seems an inevitable march towards modernity, and even though the final

scenes of the play show that, in many ways, Henry IV is no better than Richard, it is this pattern of political kings is continued in the following plays of the Henriad. *Richard II* shows convention as a dying thing, and progress as inevitable, if somewhat tragic.

Taylor McCabe

### ***Fortune's Fool***

*Fortune's Fool* portrays the homecoming of a young woman named Olga, recently married and come of age. While she and her husband Pyotr attempt to settle in her family estate, they encounter a nasty, classist neighbor, Tropatchov, whose goading of their impoverished lodger Kuzovkin prompts the revelation that Olga is really Kuzovkin's daughter.

*Fortune's Fool* has a lot in common with *From Morning to Midnight* in terms of how money is viewed. We don't ever see it, yet it clearly plays a huge role in the tension of this play. The historical context for the story is that it was written in 1848, a time when serfdom still existed in Russia, causing very extreme class divides among people. This is no less present in the play than it would have been in real life at that time. There is not really a middle class to speak of, leaving only the nobility and the laborers, or serfs.

The costumes of the different characters in the play represented this stark economic split: the nobility are dressed in Westernized clothing whereas the servants in the house are wearing more grungy clothes with folk patterns on them, imitating their retained connection to peasant roots versus the high society inclinations of the nobility.

Everything in the set is very deliberately placed. For example, when Vassily and Olga are speaking and the truth about her mother is coming out, the portrait of her mother that is hanging on the wall appears between their heads, as though she were literally coming between them. During this conversation, actually, some interesting language occurs, wherein Olga finds out she is the daughter of someone in the serf class and she says, "I don't know what I am," rather than "who." This, in addition to the costumes and the overall plot really works to solidify the classist climate in Russia at the time.

Julia Sklar

*Fortune's Fool* had an elaborate set that helped to further its themes and plot. The importance of a connection to the land is emphasized heavily throughout the play. Kuzovkin often laments that he is homeless except for the estate where he is a guest and has no ties to a piece of land. Olga, the lady of the house who has not visited since she was a young girl, is one of the characters with the greatest attachment to the land and represents purity, innocence and kindness. Upon her arrival home, the set's many doors lift and open revealing a garden reminiscent of Eden. Later in the play, during the lunch party while Tropatchov makes increasingly hurtful jibes at Kuzovkin, the lighting in the garden shifts to a deep red, suggesting a darker side to being a landed elite. While Tropatchov has lived in the country the longest, he has the least connection to the land and the least concern for those of lower social status than he, suggesting that he is less of a gentleman than he may like to believe. Similarly to the set of *Fault Lines*, the openness of the set for *Fortune's Fool* allowed for greater visibility of the actors. It is apparent, whether in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain or aristocratic Russia, the idea that one is visible at all times is a common theme.

Kat McCorkle

*Fortune's Fool's* set aids in revealing parts of the characters' inner struggles and emotions. The use of hanging door frames worked to establish partitioned off rooms in an otherwise very open stage. In the beginning, when Olga and Pyotr first enter, light fills the rooms and flats raise to expose a very airy and free space in which Olga and Pyotr happily explore and play in. This sudden change establishes these characters as separate and untouched by the structured life of the nobility within estate. However, this kind of light and open space is not seen again within the play, replaced by the structure of rooms, doors, hallways and even a confined ceiling. These realistic interiors of a home emphasize the prism of the nobility, limited by social hierarchy and rules, which contrasts with the free and open mindset of Olga when she first enters the home. However, after the second act, the openness of the garden is only referenced through the windows in the study. Olga remains maintained within the confines of the home, even to rooms not even onstage. The set itself stands as a barrier, representing her change from a young and free woman to a wife and responsible house holder.

Elizabeth Riedman

### ***Fuerzabruta***

*Fuerzabruta* was not a dramatic play, but rather a display of a series of acrobatic and dynamic performances accompanied by the use of electronic beats and an array of colorful lights. Although many of the movements within the production were undoubtedly carefully choreographed, in several scenes such as the one where the performers were walking amongst the crowds looking for volunteers to bash their heads against cardboard boxes, it was obvious that the performers acted spontaneously. This is different from a simple improvisation, as that would imply the use of a stage and a clear performer-audience relation. Rather, in *Fuerzabruta*, there were scenes where the gap between the performer and the audience was literally non-existent; the interaction was no longer reliant on vocal communication but on physical contact. In these instances the fourth wall was demolished completely, and that is probably why people consider *Fuerzabruta* to be an "experience" rather than it being a show or a play.

Yuji Wakimoto

Similarly to *Jack and the Beanstalk's* strategy of breaking the fourth wall for its entertainment value, *Fuerzabruta* is also directly dependent on audience participation for its success. In fact, there are certain aspects of their performance that would be nearly impossible without the aid of the audience. When they had the inflatable dome pulled over the stage, it was the audience's responsibility to keep it lifted while it inflated. The spectacle would not have been possible without complete participation. Furthermore, the production provided completely new experiences that the audience members would never be able to have anywhere else, as when, for example, the performers selected two audience members to walk across the top of the dome with them. The breaking of the fourth wall in this production was crucial to its immersion and gave it a unique power. While similar to *Jack and the Beanstalk's* form of immersion, it differs in that the experience also broke people out of their comfort zones. They were not just shouting at performers with the option of participating, but really being forced to whether they wanted to or not.

Danny Mensel

*Fuertzabruta* forced the audience into a situation of chaos. The audience participated actively in the performance, abandoning reality upon entering the set. Although the crowd became more concretely a part of the act than in *Fault Lines*, the audience was put in a space of wonder with nothing physically concrete to ground them. The set was just as alive as the actors in it.

Seemingly invisible forces herded the audience around in a circular and ever changing environment to allow the set room to change; personal space gave way as the set constantly morphed with additions and subtractions, performers moving quickly from one space to another through an onslaught of disorienting lights, flashing and changing colors. There was no sense of front, back, top, bottom, left, right — a prelude to a performance that did not necessarily intend to make sense.

Perceptions became instantly warped; in addition to the ever-changing physicality of the stage, time became warped as well. The entire performance, literally a whirlwind around and within the audience, felt like a whirlwind of time. Pools of water hung closely above the audience's heads, actors splashing, throwing themselves into the water, to create moving patterns. Strobe lights stilled the flowing water, distorting time as one shape jumped to another; this altered fluidity defied convention.

While the meaning of *Fuertzabruta* is elusive indeed, the set created a certain futility. The performers were constantly at odds with the set, whether throwing their bodies against it (like the actors in the water) or trying to escape or overcome it as an obstacle. The actors did not seem able to get what they wanted, and the audience, arms raised to interact with the characters above them, failed to make a lasting connection (though connecting plenty with other audience members sardined around them). A giant sail prevented a female character from reaching a man on the other side, both working tirelessly without progress. Two other girls chased each other in an endless circle around the walls of the stage, never catching one another. The reoccurring man in white was always running, trying to keep up with the moving platform on which he tread without getting sidetracked by hurled objects, including bullets. At one point, he was confined in a tube, air blowing upward, keeping him from progressing downward. The actor performed to the will of the set in a nod toward man vs. man-made.

The set also emphasized the themes of temporality and its resultant lack of control. The set created obstacles between performers, creating a feeling of tension, suspense, and lack of control that transferred to the audience. As a unit shoved from one spot to another, the audience likewise lacked control, wondering intently what would happen next, when the end would come, and what that end would be. The audience reached to touch performers as they quickly swept away in the same way the actors could not keep a hold on each other. We experienced the same feelings the performers experienced as we were all affected by the power and physical presence of the set.

The audience experienced what the actors were portraying in a new visual language. There was no understandable dialogue between the performers and nothing was clearly communicated to the audience. Audience understanding came from our visual interpretations of how the set interacted with the actors and how the actors interacted with the set as they were trying to overcome its “brute force.”

Molly Nemer

## *Dorothea's Story*

*Dorothea's Story* is one of a set of three plays adapting George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*.

*Dorothea's Story*, as we are told in the first lines narrated to us, takes place in an English provincial town 'before Reform,' from 1830 to 1832. As such, we are presented with the prevailing feelings of the English landed gentry during a period when their traditional privileges and ways of life were under siege. Strict social stratification still existed, as indeed it would for a century hence, but the influx of newly enriched middle class entrepreneurs and the debate over a more representative national parliament colors the narrative and adds some uneasiness to the happenings of the daily communal life in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea is an interesting protagonist for exploring these issues; she is an iconoclast, a woman who eschews traditional ideas of love and the suitability of a husband, against the advice of her family, for her own ideas of seeking intellectual enlightenment, satisfaction by practical industriousness, and a life that is rich on its own account without being enslaved by the seeking of wealth. However, she also reflects that traditional ideas of how a woman should behave in a marriage, seeking to be a devoted aide and complacent companion to her difficult husband, upholding her honor and often remaining oblivious to the romantic aspirations of her suitors, especially Ladislaw. Dorothea represents the paradox of the age: she is a woman who is extremely well-educated, cultured, and capable; but she is also expected to subvert her own ambitions for those of her family and husband, taking no part in public life, having no right to vote, being dishonored if she were to take up a career of her own, and generally expected to function as more of a desirable piece of furniture in a husband's house, rather than a fully-actualized human being. As such, Dorothea can do little to shape her environment; rather, she can only choose to meet the obstacles in her path with forbearance and dignity, and try to avoid being swept under by the historical current that equally affects each of the other characters (with the exception of her sister and former suitor, who have retired to domestic complacency).

Dorothea is too devoted to her family and their love to her to attempt a direct break with tradition; instead, she suffers the humiliations of Casaubon and the unsatisfactory life she lives with him patiently, and even after his death she bears her frustration with his cruel posthumous edict in a dignified manner. George Eliot herself, as a woman who was forced to write as a man to avoid the prejudice of her contemporaries, and writing a half-century after the narrative's setting, can be seen as alluding to the backwardness of this situation and hints at the change to come. The action in *Dorothea's Story* predates the accession of Queen Victoria or the activism of Florence Nightingale, but her interest in scientific agriculture, architecture, and erudition of all sorts demonstrate Dorothea's competence and serve to highlight the shackles placed upon her by the conservative society she was born into. Just as she is forced into her young marriage and its limitations by expectation, her uncle is expected to enter Parliament (and thus forced to take a stand on Reform, which he botches to his detriment), Casaubon is expected to publish his life's work (though as it turns out, all his effort amounts to scribbling as more advanced and broadly educated foreign scholars have already made his insular efforts obsolete), and Ladislaw is expected to not degrade his family's honor by working in the baser trade of journalism (though he proves far more successful and committed to this trade than any of his previous nebulous career plans).

Mark Patch

Dorothea allowed her imagination uncontrolled access to her decision-making and evaluation of her life. Dorothea falls in love with Casaubon thinking that he has more to give her than he already had, when really she only imagining him as she wanted him to be. This is an example of when imagination is injurious and results in her life not being as she wanted it. After her first husband dies, the audience sees her about to make the same mistake again with Will for whom she is willing to give up her wealth. Clearly she romanticized what her life was to be with her young suitor but she did not give full consideration to the reality of the situation as demonstrated by her statement of being poor meant “no more new clothes” and that she would “learn the prices of things.”

Sophia Catalano

We saw a number of plays presented in theatres in the round, and each one handled and utilized the setup slightly differently. In *Dorothea's Story*, the arrangement worked to play off the fact that this interpretation of the story showed Dorothea's perspective through the eyes of the other characters. In contrast to the single narrator in *Henry V*, this narration was from one omnipresent point of view, but conveyed through the mouths of all of the supporting characters in the play. Oftentimes, the narration would be about Dorothea and would come from Dorothea herself, although in the third person. This was an interesting approach to the story, because it made it feel as though we were getting different perspectives from different characters, but in reality when they took on the role of narrator, they were meant to be speaking somewhat anonymously, not as their characters.

The setup of the theatre really added to this form of omniscient and omnipresent narration, since the characters that were “off duty” would sit within the audience, at the edge of the row, instead of backstage. From these seats is where they would interject with narrations. Altogether, this had the effect of forcing us, the audience, to be literally within the story.

The story itself and the characterization of Dorothea felt a bit jumbled, though. At first she seems to be cast as the knowledgeable, independent woman against her sister's flighty, marriage-obsessed persona, in a very Jane Austen sort of juxtaposition. Dorothea wants to focus on her plans for the city, while her sister is focused on finding a husband. This is soon proven to be the opposite of the truth, when Dorothea leaps into a marriage, ostensibly, partly for the wealth attributed to the suitor. She then becomes one of the most subordinate wives I've ever seen in a play, and is relegated to mere nothingness after the death of her husband until she submits to her passionate feelings for Ladislav. Her sister Celia, on the other hand, marries happily, bears a child, settles in, and overall quickly reveals herself to be the wise, sensible sister.

There isn't really a solid gravitational pull into this plot since Dorothea is the central character, and we largely have no idea who Dorothea is by the end. Is she the smart, strong woman? The romantic? The submissive, doting wife? Her characterization shifts so swiftly throughout the play that her identity is left up in the air.

Julia Sklar

## ***Not I, Footfalls, and Rockaby***

*This production consisted of three rarely-performed short plays (or really monologues) by Samuel Beckett. The plays, all performed by a single actress, are thematically linked, particularly in regard to language-use, identity, and death.*

The Beckett trilogy, consisting of *Not I*, *Footfalls*, and *Rockaby*, made use of both verbal and non-verbal language. Traditionally, for Beckett, the text itself was often enough. For Beckett, what seemed to be more important than *what* was being spoken, was the style in which it was spoken (*how*). *Not I* is all about verbal language. Its rapid, fragmented, and mostly monotone “stream of consciousness” speech is performed at the speed of thought. The lady, who talks of being unable to communicate in verbal language throughout her life, seems to be spilling them all out now in some type of purgatory/afterlife state. The words she speaks are at too rapid of a pace to comprehend, which conveys to us that she finally has a chance (under time pressure) to communicate to an audience the thoughts that she held inside for so long, for a lifetime of silence. This “language” in a sense, although presently verbal, represents a potential shortcoming of the use of words; that words often fail to represent inward realities. The character’s speech is uncontrollable, yet the actress’s speech is perfectly controlled; a contrast that represents a sort of tension and release. The language, though rapid, is rhythmic. We do catch bits and pieces of what is being said. Perhaps this is because people could only *partially* understand her during her lifetime. Both the actress and the audience alike suffer from sensory deprivation, from only being able to see a pinhole of the mouth in the darkness; a light/dark visual contrast that is daunting, anxiety-provoking, and makes us uncomfortable. But that is what she is trying to convey—the rapid-paced monologue, the red (symbolizing blood?) lips in the darkness, is all a perfectly tied-together “language” for the audience to get a general sense of her painful and miserable life on earth. Her laughs, screams, and occasional pauses provide us with some relief from feeling “choked”. We can also consider here the powerful ambiguity of the third-person language; is the lady referring to herself or someone else? Another element of the language is repetition. For example, the words “godforsaken hole” are repeated throughout the monologue—first to convey for us an image of her mother’s vagina—since the lady felt no love, no care, entirely cursed, why was she even conceived and born? Why was she given life? The other uses of the “godforsaken hole” are to convey an image of the mouth on earth attempting to communicate, then the same mouth vomiting in the lavatory, then the hole in the ground where she might have suffocated herself, then the hole she crept into in the darkness when she died. The power of verbal repetition in the monologue highlights important points throughout.

In *Footfalls*, the sound of nine footsteps per each one meter stretch was comparable to a metronome, and timing was crucial. The image of a ghostlike figure pacing back and forth across the stage created a footstep rhythm as a sort of “language.” The slow pacing of both the footsteps and speech made us feel like we were living through someone else’s gradual nightmare—the precise timing and quasi-musical structure functioned to convey a steadiness of emotion. Words aside, the footsteps were the center of the monologue. The back-and-forth pacing of the steps could be connected to the back-and-forth conversation between May and her mother. The mother is never seen, only heard. This creates ambiguity—are May and her mother one and the same? Has May transformed into her mother? The mother may also represent the past that is haunting her daughter. As the walking slows, lighting dims, and tone gets quieter, all elements of which

take a part in the overall “language” of the production, the mother and daughter seem to be one and the same.

In *Rockaby*, the mechanized rhythm of the rocking chair, which seems to rock by itself, is similar to language of the nine-step metronome in *Footfalls* that conveys the message that time is running out, just as the mouth in *Not I* is delivering words at the speed of thought under time pressure. Overall, language in Beckett’s trilogy was designed to make audiences feel, by the end of the production, that time had passed much more quickly than an hour (the actual time). Yet all three monologues together encompass the agonies of many lifetimes.

Allison Saba

The Samuel Beckett trilogy *Not I/ Footfalls/Rockaby* is clearly focused on the useless and confusing nature of language as a whole, especially the stream-of-consciousness monologue *Not I*. This play completely drowns the audience in information which is both vague and cyclic, thereby serving to only confuse the listener as to the actual action of the story. The theme of confusion is further advanced by constant denials of self and frequently repeated questions. A prime example is the recurring “What? Who? ... No, she!”. This form of self-denial through language also appears in *Footfalls* as the distinction between May and Amy blurs and *Rockaby* as it becomes unclear whether the narrator is describing her own death or the death of another woman. In Beckett’s hands language serves only to confuse the listener. It doesn’t clarify. These plays have very little action which can help to define the language used. *Not I* especially, since the play is only a stream of words delivered by a projected mouth. *Not I* seems to suggest that verbal language without physical movement cannot possibly deliver a clear narrative, since the words become entangled within themselves without a physical anchor. Both *Footfalls* and *Rockaby* contain a single, metronomic movement (either a series of steps or a consistent rocking) which serves as little more than a time-keeper for the language of the plays themselves. These productions were crafted entirely around language itself, and because of that the language became naturally convoluted. The minimal staging and props forced the language to hold the stage, and it really did. Through Beckett’s writing and Lisa Dwan’s spectacular performance language becomes a weapon, ensnaring the speaker and misleading the listener. Language is its own creature in these plays. *Not I/Footfalls/Rockaby* shows a world of women trying to understand themselves and their pain, and in their own descriptions losing themselves. These productions showed that language cannot reveal truth in clear and easy ways, though some form of truth may eventually be revealed.

Steven Winkelman

## *Mojo*

Although set against the backdrop of the late 1950’s rock ‘n’ roll scene in Soho, *Mojo* does not explore the impact of this fast-paced setting on the characters. Rather, the show reflects on the murder of one “invisible” character – club owner Ezra – and its effect on the progression of the plot. Ezra’s offstage death lends itself to chaos on the stage. The other characters spiral into a state of panic and uncertainty about the events to follow. The fear instilled by his death ultimately precipitates the action that marks the second half of the play. Skinny’s murder, for example, is carried out with the gun that Mickey purchases to “protect” the club employees from Ezra’s fate. Additionally, Ezra’s mangled body remains onstage for a considerable length of

time as a sort of omniscient surveyor of life after his death, as well as a reminder for the audience of that which controls the play. Upon closer inspection, one may note that Ezra does not only exert his influence on the characters posthumously. His abusive relationship with his son, Baby, most likely motivates Baby's psychotic behavior observed throughout the play. *Mojo* reveals the power of a single individual to impact others indefinitely.

Grade Lisandrelli

In *Mojo*, one sees very strong artistic conventions being pushed. The play is extremely vulgar, from the language, to the subject matter, to the drug use. The F-word and the C-word are dropped numerous times through the production with every character using them almost equally. Furthermore, whereas many plots are driven by actual, concrete events, in *Mojo*, the plot is driven by the visceral emotional reactions of the characters to one another. Finally, the artistic conventions regarding what we can and cannot see represented onstage were shattered when Luke is shot in the head and bleeds to death before our eyes: the character does not stumble into the wings or get dragged quickly off: rather, we watch as pints of blood pour out of his head.

Danny Mensel

*Mojo* is set up in two distinct acts that stand in opposition to one another in terms of the level of distress present. The play opens with a thumping bass line, a charismatic, young male rock star bouncing around with excited energy, and the anticipatory screams of waiting fans; from there, the plot descends into relative chaos, in conjunction with the literal descent of the set. In this sense, the set reflects the inner workings of the story, rather than just acting as a prop for the action in the play.

The first act takes place entirely on what is obviously the top floor of an establishment, for the top of the downward staircase can be seen. The surroundings are very clearly an office or an administrative area of some kind—there's a desk and stacked paperwork—but the presence of a jukebox makes it clear that this isn't a staunch, tight-laced setting. The first downward movement that takes place in the play is the young rock star, Silver Johnny, jumping down into the staircase in the opening scene. That he should be the first character to “descend” is ultimately prophetic, as he is later revealed to be passively central to the deaths of Ezra, Sam Ross, and Skinny Luke, the three catastrophic events that move the otherwise waiting-heavy plot forward.

The rest of the play follows suit similarly. Upstairs is where childish, raucous behavior takes place when the characters are literally elevated, hovering metaphorically above reality and responsibility. That isn't to say that the scenes that take place upstairs are necessarily lighthearted and joyous; they do contain a dark sense of humor, but nothing is quite real. At one point, immature chaos breaks loose, and Skinny Luke is tied to the jukebox with his pants off, Baby is shirtless and wielding a samurai sword, Sweets is standing on top of the desk—stomping on the only symbol of weighted responsibility in the room—with a lamp protecting his face, and running around aimlessly. This is in contrast to the chaos that later breaks loose downstairs, which is much darker and more real.

As the cast descends in the second act to the bottom floor of the set, it's as if they are falling into reality, adulthood, and responsibility. It is there that Baby first mentions wanting a leadership role in the club, expressing the interest to take after his dad; it is also here that we are first introduced to Ezra's severed body, although we never actually see it; and it is also here where the real, irreversibly tragic chaos takes place, as Baby shoots and kills Skinny Luke, and Mickey ends up with Skinny Luke's blood literally on his hands. By moving the cast and plot of

*Mojo* from upstairs to downstairs, the set becomes a physical metaphor or reflection of the inner workings of the characters as they move from elevated, childish chaos to grounded, actually catastrophic chaos.

Julia Sklar

### ***The Duchess of Malfi***

*During this trip, we were fortunate enough to obtain a small number of tickets to a play in the inaugural season of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse at the Globe Theatre. Named after Sam Wanamaker, whose efforts prompted the reconstruction of the Globe during the 1990s, the Playhouse serves as an indoor, year-round complement to the outdoor, warm-weather Globe. Like the Globe, the Playhouse was constructed using only methods and materials available during the Renaissance.*

The *Duchess of Malfi*, written by Shakespeare's contemporary John Webster, features a bold heroine in the *Duchess*, who secretly marries for love against her scheming brothers' orders. When the brothers murder her and her family, her servant Bosola undertakes a bloody revenge.

Many of the lines performed by characters in *The Duchess of Malfi* alluded to their own awareness of their fates. Most notably the Duchess herself and Daniel de Bosola both refer to themselves as characters upon a stage, doing what they are told and not exactly knowing why. This level of self-awareness seems to suggest that certain characters know that their actions are irrational, yet they're doing them anyway because they are on a stage. It also alludes to the irrationality which infects many people in a state of rage or revenge, when they act not like a human being but as some fictional character. The play also questioned the theatricality of those who hold royal or official positions, such as The Cardinal, who appears pious and holy to the public but is a cruel and vicious man in reality. The questioning of the logic behind their actions also served to mock the irrationality of so many characters in revenge tragedies who lose their wits to passion and kill others before dying themselves. It was a subtle wink at the ridiculousness of the entire premise. In the play, each of the characters must hide themselves from others and act pure and chaste while in public. This is a commentary on both the theatrical aspect of politics and the fact that many people hide their true lives in their boudoir. The political references were heightened by constant allusions between hiding, politics and the devil's work. And the boudoir references were shown through the Duchess's story arc. When she finally revealed who she was sleeping with, she was imprisoned and executed. The characters realized in their death throes that their actions were irrational, but they also realized that they were compelled to do them.

Steven Winkelman

### ***Blink***

Although this play was billed as a love story, the more potent aspect of the narrative was the back-story about visibility. Visibility plays a major role throughout the performance, both in the narrative itself and also in how this narrative was transferred to the audience. The most obvious aspect of the narrative that relates to this theme is the foundation for the love story, that the two characters are first connected through a sort of voyeuristic relationship conveyed via a

video-enabled baby monitor. Jonah can watch Sophie, Sophie knows she's being watched, but Sophie can't watch Jonah back, at least not through the baby monitor. Sophie has the advantage of knowing that Jonah lives beneath her, so she can watch him outside her window. Despite that their relationship is predicated on such visibility, a type of vulnerability and openness that tends to yield good results for a relationship, theirs ultimately falls apart, an interesting twist on the plot of a self-proclaimed "love story."

Visibility also functions in how the characters interact with the audience. At first it manifests through words. The story opens with both of the characters opening up to us about their pasts, their families, upbringings, etc. They share a number of telling and personal anecdotes about themselves. So, although in this stage they haven't actually shown us anything or been seen by anyone, they are making their stories visible. It's unusual to get that much information about a character at the outset of a play; usually, one has to wait for the narrative to reveal itself, in order to understand a character. Here, the characters do the revealing automatically for us.

Julia Sklar

In *Blink* there was no fourth wall. The two characters, Jonah and Sophie, explain from the beginning that they are talking directly to the audience; they are storytelling in the older sense of the word, not acting, but actually storytelling. Little bits of acting were included, but it was largely a narrative story. It was done in a three-frontal push stage where the actors could just walk up and show the audience parts of the props and set. They had a very stylized action with the props where the important ones were set out in plain sight. This gave the impression of personalized storytelling rather than a large staged act. The props were there to outline the story that the audience had already heard. By keeping the props in plain sight, the audience could remind themselves of the story. This allowed the story to feel more personal, like sitting down to coffee with Jonah and Sophie to hear about their lives over the past few years.

Kara Allen

*Blink* centers around the re-telling of a love story, containing a significant amount of a dialogue and direct story-telling to the audience. However, the use of first-person dialogue limits the audience to a biased point of view. We must believe what the characters tell us as truth or must use their stories and reenactments to reconstruct our own versions of a kind of reality behind the story. Without a third person narrative, *Blink* acknowledges the natural bias of narrators when attempting to retell a story in theater. With the absence of fact, the audience is forced to use their imagination and fill in the gaps to the story. *Blink* successfully provides the freedom to viewers to reach their own conclusions, allowing each individual audience member to walk out of the theater having been drawn into their very own version of reality.

Elizabeth Riedman

## *Candide*

*We saw a unique performance of the Bernstein operetta of Voltaire's Candide, about a naïve young man who suffers a series of misadventures as he seeks "the best of all possible worlds."*

*Candide* is derived from an action-packed novella by Voltaire and some of the occurrences are impossible to stage. For example, there is an earthquake and multiple hangings in the book that are also in the operetta. Since it is impossible to portray these instances accurately, the production opted instead to take a humorous and imaginative stance. When the earthquake happens, Candide is pinned to the ground by a heavy boulder, which is in fact comparable to a large pillow. Because of the cast's acting, the audience must 'see' the pillow for what it is meant to be instead of what it is. The same goes for the ships that they sail, which are really cast members holding banners and standing on chairs in a ship-like formation. Since this production of *Candide* is framed as though it is a 'play within a play,' the imaginative set adds to the sense of artifice that is already abundant.

Katherine Briant

Similarly to *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Candide* utilized audience participation throughout the production as a way to break the fourth wall. The set itself – the audience being seated in the round, and the platforms above the audience – also helped to eliminate the sense of *any* walls separating the audience from the action. Thus, both the set and the use of audience participation to break the fourth wall helped to keep the audience engaged and interested in the story and characters. (I may be a bit biased, as my participation in the production consisted of getting to wear a Spanish Inquisition hat and being offered a marshmallow by one of the actors.) Though the audience participation aspect of *Candide* was similar to *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the content of the two shows was vastly different. *Candide* was definitely less kid friendly, and the nearness of the action to the audience seemed to insist that the audience consider some of the heavier themes of the production, such as community, death, and happiness. *Candide* is satirical, and being nearly a part of the production reminds one that the issues the characters face in the play are dilemmas we face in the real world.

Kat McCorkle

*Candide* questioned the benefit of blind positivity in the face of horrible reality, a reliance on youth and beauty, belief in any form of divine power and a belief in one's own virtue or the virtue of others. By showcasing the horrors of war and tragedy, and then forcing the characters to sing joyful songs between them, *Candide* illustrated the utter hypocrisy of optimists in the real world. It also criticized the cheeriness of musicals while it itself was a musical. A strong moment of theatricality occurred during the intermission, when the cast interacted with the audience not as their *Candide* characters but as the characters of actors preparing for the next act to begin. The entire play seemed to question the legitimacy of any real performance piece, or of any event in real life. Death was not a tangible threat in the world of *Candide*, since characters constantly returned from the grave. There were very few strong limits which the characters faced on their journeys. The final message, that life is neither good nor bad but it simply is, can only be delivered after the utter rush of ridiculousness and utter theatricality which was *Candide*. It had to wear the audience down before they could accept such a bleak final message, but it worked.

Candide was theater for theater for theater's sake, and it was so convoluted that it almost made sense.

Steven Winkelman

### *Matilda*

*Matilda is a musical adaptation of Roald Dahl's classic children's book about a lonely young girl who realizes she has special powers.*

In *Matilda*, Matilda uses imagination to avoid her neglectful home life and enjoy an intellectual world instead. But the songs and set allow even adults to be drawn into this child's world by reminding them of all the games and lives they imagined they would lead as an adult when they were a child. This imaginative quality is further supported by adults that are playing school children alongside with the actual child actors. This helps the adults in the audience have actors they can relate to. Imagination is portrayed as a way to shape one's world both in the immediate present -- like when Matilda uses her mind to avoid her horrible home life and to come up with creative ways to stand up to her evil school teacher -- and as a way to design the life one wants -- as with the song "When I Grow Up."

Kara Allen

*Matilda* offers a highly optimistic outlook on imagination as a means of creating a better life for oneself. Matilda's approach to imagination markedly differs from the main characters of other shows that we saw. While the clerk [of *From Morning to Midnight*] and Bateman [of *American Psycho*] become enveloped and play a "starring role" in their delusions, Matilda assumes a more distant role. She indulges in reading the product of *others'* imaginations as a way to escape her dysfunctional living situation. When she devises her own "made-up" story about the love affair between the escapologist and the acrobat, she does not place herself in the story; she merely recounts the tale to the librarian. Matilda later discovers that the tale reflects the actual experiences of Ms. Honey, who becomes Matilda's salvation by the close of the show. Imagination, then, brings individuals together in *Matilda*. Finally, Matilda takes a proactive stance to improve her reality, unlike the clerk and Bateman, who look to fantasy to solve their problems. She harnesses the supernatural to initiate real events that change her life, such as her cryptic chalkboard message to Ms. Trunchbull.

Grace Lisandrelli

In *Matilda*, rebellion, especially among children oppressed by adults merely because they are small and different, is shown as righteous and necessary. In the song "Naughty," Matilda points out that simply listening to adults isn't right, and that "sometimes you have to be a little bit naughty." As the children team up to combat the menacing Miss Trunchbull, who detests children collectively, this "naughtiness," a term that evokes mild childish misbehavior, becomes "rebellion," which grants righteousness to the children's cause. The choreography of the musical mimics the force which the lyrics give to the children: rather than having adults play the child roles (as in *Elephantom*) or sticking to dreamy, childlike dancing (as in *The Wind in the Willows*), *Matilda's* ensemble numbers are danced by children, and the dances themselves are

sharp and aggressive. Innovation and rebellion among children as a positive feature is a common theme in much of Roald Dahl's work.

Taylor McCabe

## ***STOMP***

Similarly to *Elephantom*, *Stomp* was a performance that did not use any words. However, there were vocal sounds being made to show acknowledgement, anger and laughter. Going in to the performance, I believed it was going to be more like a cabaret of different musical pieces, so I was pleasantly surprised when there was a bit of a story and there was character development. There was a leader, a silly character, and a character that was treated like the low man on the totem pole. Without words, the cast developed these characters through their actions and hand gestures. The audience responded similarly to how they would any other performance. They were engaged, and they participated when the cast prompted them to. This shows that words are not necessary elements in storytelling, or in appreciation of a performance.

Dan Slavin

*Stomp's* movement gives a sense of camaraderie among the performers. The non-verbal communication does not seem to stem from an inadequacy of words, but from an exploration of different types of language. Just as the performers turn everyday objects into percussion instruments, they challenge expectations about language by telling a narrative without words. Despite a lack of conversation, it is clear that one of the performers is not accepted by the rest and tries to prove himself in order to fit in. The actors tell this story just by their facial expressions and body movements, using different instruments of communication like they improvised their musical instruments.

Katherine Briant

In *Stomp*, we were not only allowed to have a voice, we were encouraged to. The audience was necessary in creating some of the noise that filled the theater. We became part of the sounds and the sounds were the essence of this production. There were call and response-like interactions between audience and performer where one of the "stompers" clapped twice at the audience and we knew instinctively to clap twice back. The "stomper" would clap faster, perhaps adding another element to the pattern, and the audience knew to do the same in turn. Sometimes the performers "tricked" the audience by building to really fast, relatively complicated patterns beyond our abilities and they would smirk and laugh at us a bit. They would wave their hands towards the audience, dismissing us as "non-stompers," reminding us of their superior talent. Not only did they get us to participate, but they actually interacted with us. This interaction added interest to what could have been a monotonous performance.

The audience got to know the members of the *Stomp* team as individuals, each with a different and distinct personality. The cast member who was tall, lanky, awkward, and offbeat (not in a literal sense), often looked at the audience and shrugged his shoulders when he acted in ways that showed he was on a different page than the other performers. He acknowledged us as a presence and we saw through bashful head turns that he was sometimes almost embarrassed that we witnessed his shortcomings.

Molly Nemer

Similarly to *Elephantom*, *STOMP* lacked nonverbal language in favor of rhythmic sound and movement, choreographed body and object percussion, and facial expressions/body language. The visual aspect of this production largely relied on choreographed movement, and distinct facial expressions and body language, to convey comedic undertones and establish character, such as in the kid who was continuously “left out” of the action. We felt emotionally connected to him by the end of the production because of the way he was treated throughout. But this time it was not words that were used in allowing us to sympathize with the character. *STOMP* also relied on the use of props: typical street objects that we see or use on a day-to-day basis, creatively conveying the message to us, through the use of percussive “language,” that we should not take our bodies or our environments for granted, for there are numerous innovative uses for them. The impressive choreography was the center of the show, the outlet through which the actors expressed themselves. Whether it was stomps, snaps, claps, hits, brushes, swoops, passes of basketballs, clicking of lighters, banging of garbage cans, or drumming on tubes, the “music” or the “language” of the show was perfectly rhythmic and rehearsed, similar to verbal beat-boxing. The purposeful absence of verbal language in *STOMP* may have been a function of the creator’s realization of the shortcoming of words—that sometimes we need a unique, rhythmic cleansing of the senses to breakthrough to our souls and keep us feeling alive.

Allison Saba