

Theater in London Journal

by

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THEATER IN LONDON 2011-2012

Walk Fast, or be left Behind

Theater In London:

Walk Fast or be left Behind

Throughout this journal, I have pasted in photocopies of a few little sketches I did while on the trip. I tried to scan them in, but it turns out I'm a little too technically illiterate to accomplish that. They're usually very, very rough quick sketches that I did during some play intermissions or before they started, but I am a visual person and these are like my own little visual notes to myself. I hope you enjoy them!

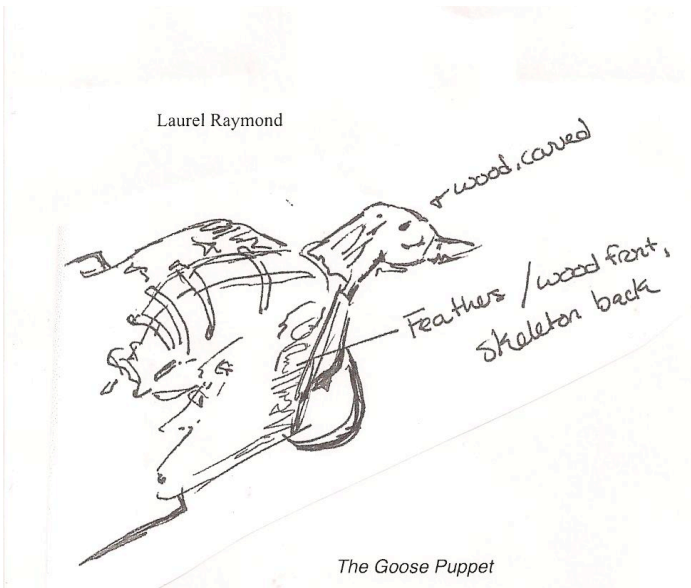
Dec 30th, 2011

Daily Events

On this, our first day in London, I went with a large group of students to Camden Markets. It was thoroughly overwhelming and quite wonderful. Our group separated and I wandered about myself, not so much looking to shop but just to observe. My favorite part was going down into the Horse Stalls part of the market, where there were funky art and antique shops and which had huge bronze statues of horses everywhere. I may have gotten whiplash from trying to look everywhere at once – but it was a great place to acquire unique souvenirs if you wished to bring back something a little different for your friends and family.

War Horse

War Horse was one of the plays I was most excited to see, as I had previously seen a newsclip about the puppets. I don't remember quite when or where I saw this newsclip, but I remember finding the very idea of the puppetry fascinating. I was anticipating the spectacle of the fantastic machination, however, I had not given much thought to the effect of the puppetry. Although the spectacle of the horses is, well, *spectacular*, using puppets serves another purpose:



it emphasizes the blurred line of reality and imagination.

The puppets seem as real, or sometimes even more real, than the actors of the play. They come alive, yet still the audience remains at some level conscious that they are puppets. This juxtaposition creates a sort of cognitive discord within the play: they are real, and yet they are imaginary. This discord, rather than being jarring, instead creates a

space for the play that is somewhere between reality and imagination, a blurred line further reinforced by the strip of paper hanging above the stage. Supposedly from Major Nichols' sketchpad, often the set began grounded on the stage and was continued on this strip of sketch paper. I think it was important that these were sketches and not photographs – while a photograph typically is a (more or less) faithful reproduction of 'reality', a drawing is the artist's interpretation of the scene, a visual representation influenced by their viewpoint and imagination. The use of this setting thus placed the set in a blurry place – influenced both by the 'reality' of the tangible actors and set and by Nichols' perception of the war and what he saw. The dynamic interaction between the sketchbook and the set, the actors and the puppets, created an interaction between the 'real' and the 'not real' that for me was highlighted particularly by the birds – puppets that flew over the audience and were tangibly on stage, but also were reflected onto the canvas.

This in-between setting was appropriate for a play about WW1, a war that was in many ways caught between modernity and tradition. The traditional calvary charge into machine guns, as Friedrich Muller characterized it in the play, was “folly”. This folly, needlessly sacrificing horses such as Joey, was rooted in both loyalty to tradition and in inability to adapt to the realities of the present. In a way, it was also living in imagination – in nostalgia for the noble wars of the past. Billy Naracott’s death shows the lethality of living in the past. He dies for the sake of a knife used by his father and grandfather, given to him for use in a war in which close hand fighting was rendered mostly obsolete by machine guns and tanks. He died because of his refusal to give up the weapons of his forefathers– just as the Yeomen Calvary died because they continued charging straight into machine guns.

“In-between” could describe the play’s human protagonist as well. Albert Naracott, at 16 for most of the play, is in between a man and a boy. When he goes to war, typically the occupation of men, the difference between him and his comrades is emphasized in that he goes not for his country, his duty, or his woman, but for his horse. As he said to his friend David, “You have Flossie, I have Joey”.

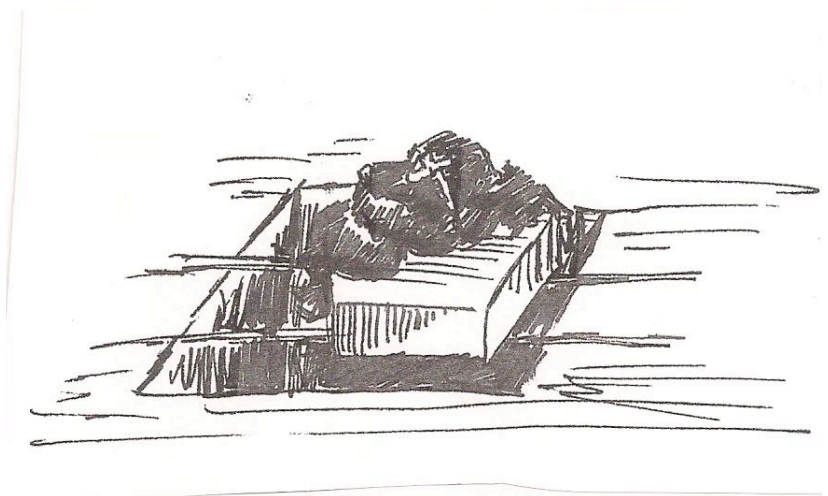
Interestingly, Joey is himself a mix, because he’s a mix of carthorse and hunting horse blood. In many ways, Joey is the ultimate in-between, the link between all of the warring factions of the play. He reminds the characters of the animality that they all share. I think the play did an excellent job representing Joey as the “no-man’s land horse”. Affection for him unites the English, the French and the Germans (or characters representing these), while desire for him also in a way becomes a commonality in the divided Narracott family, with both brothers

desiring the horse (though in this case he becomes a point of contention). He is the uniting force, reminding the warring sides of what they share.

Hamlet

Hamlet is probably the play we're seeing that I know the best, and for that reason I was both excited and apprehensive. I ended up very much enjoying the way this play toyed with my expectations, not only in the inventive setting, but also in the language and delivery of the lines. In general, I thought the delivery of the lines was impeccable and interesting, though I did notice some audience members nodding off during some of the longer monologues.

Michael Sheen's performance as Hamlet was breathtaking. Although the leaps of faith required by the setting threw me for a loop sometimes, his performance captivated me personally throughout. I don't always have the best opinion of Hamlet as a character - his decisions



The Casket from Hamlet

are erratic and sometimes maddently capricious – he's written that way. Yet Michael Sheen made me believe in all that he did and understand the motivations behind his actions. I understood his actions and his emotions, I felt his disgust and his heartbreak. He made me believe he *was* Hamlet.

The pre-show journey was a particularly interesting directorial choice; it set us up to understand and sympathize with Hamlet. The play was not only in front of our eyes, but also

inside our heads. Therefore, instead of comfortably sitting back and watching what was actually a fairly non-participatory play, we started it a bit unsettled. When the doors closed at the beginning of the performance and the room went dark, I felt trapped, claustrophobic, and a little confused. I have read some reviews of this production describing the pre-show journey as an ineffective “gimmick”, but I thought it was a very useful way of forcing the audience to relate with the characters of the play. In a way, the pre-show journey primed us for a very different take on Hamlet. With a play this well known, I think that it was almost necessary to go to such extremes when presenting such an original take of the play.

I did feel a sense of the written play’s larger political importance (and therefore some of the scope of Shakespearean tragedy) was lost by centering the play so thoroughly on Hamlet’s madness/not madness. Part of the play’s tragedy comes from the sense of what the intrigues within the palace must be doing to the nation – Denmark is stuck with either a usurper guilty of both fratricide and regicide or with Hamlet, a moody and indecisive prince who becomes obsessed with revenge. Yet in this production, the larger sense of the nation and the effect the corruption within the royal family could be having on it is completely swallowed by the insane asylum. Instead of a Prince, Hamlet is a mental patient, and instead of a nation, Denmark is a prison. While this fit with Hamlet’s description of Denmark as a prison, in its literality it almost took the effect of this and similar descriptions away. On the other hand, I really liked what the setting did for Hamlet and Laertes’ requests to leave. Claudius’ refusal to let Hamlet leave the asylum seems at once far more sinister and a little wise (as he is Hamlet’s therapist and considering how Hamlet ends up).

Claudius' role as a therapist adds yet another interesting aspect when considered with the re-conception of Gertrude. Characterizing her as drug dependent and deluded makes her behavior – including her “o’er hasty marriage” pitiable rather than malevolent or incomprehensible. Her obvious dependence on Claudius for drugs renders their relationship far more sinister in my mind, because he has complete control over her. Whether he loves her or not, she has lost complete control of choice – even more if he is her therapist as well. This rendering also allowed Hamlet’s confrontation with her in the bedroom to take on an entirely different color – I loved the way that you could see the veil and the smiling haze leave Gertrude’s face.

I also wish to briefly touch on the portrayal of Ophelia’s madness. Vinette Robinson’s portrayal in the flower scene was simply marvelous, and I loved the recasting of the flowers as pills. It added a more modern horror to the scene, or perhaps (as in Shakespeare’s time these flowers could have been used as medication) re-introduces a measure of the original meaning. In any case, it emphasized the tragedy of her madness. In this scene, we witness Ophelia’s personality completely breaking down, and in a way, psychiatric medication both re-imposes control over one’s personality and robs one of their personality. The drugs, to me, illustrate how completely she has left the “normal” world behind; she has completely broken down. Vinette Robinson’s portrayal illustrated this breakdown very skillfully, I think.

In addition, I liked the integration of music in this scene. From Robinson’s insistent strumming and seeking looks, it appeared that she was trying to use music to communicate when language failed her. It was as if she had left behind the world of rules and logic, and was reaching out through whimsy and sensation. It was interesting to see the way that normal modes of communication were breaking down as the rational world degraded. One thing that surprised

me as we saw more and more plays throughout the course was the presence of music in the plays, especially in those not branded as musicals – it functions as another aspect of the narrative, another way communicate with the audience, rather than as mere entertainment from the spectacle of song.

Dec 31, 2011

Daily Events

I stayed in this morning in anticipation of staying downtown for the New Years fireworks. This night, our group tried to make it to the river for the fireworks, but as areas by the river filled up the ways to them were barricaded, and therefore we ended up behind Parliament instead. Although we could not perhaps see some of the lower fireworks, I think we had a fantastic view. At midnight, fireworks exploded out of the top of Big Ben, which we were *not* expecting but which was awesome. It was amazing, and seeing the fireworks lighting up the sky as the backdrop of Big Ben striking midnight was the perfect view. After they ended, we joined the massive crowd in a round of Auld Lang Syne before heading back to the hotel.

Dublin Carol

The title of this play alludes to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the story of a notorious miser haunted by his past, present and future. In many ways, John, the main character of *Dublin Carol*, is similarly haunted -- haunted by his own failures and mistakes, and particularly by his alcoholic past (and present). I found the way that this play dealt with alcoholism rather unusual; here alcohol is almost both the cause and solution of John's problems. Initially, its control of him robs him of everything else in his life, but during the actual time of the play the alcohol almost seems to bring him to face unpleasant truth. He describes alcohol as

his medicine. His bashful, almost apologetic explanations that he needs it because he is old seems to show that he acknowledges the crutch. He is a character haunted by his regret, and haunted by what he did in the past because he lost control due to alcoholism.

Alcoholism is in a way a giving in to madness - to the dionysian - and the play shows the detriments of losing yourself in madness. Mark talks about how his girlfriend went crazy when he tried to break up with her, and John's remarks suggest that giving in to madness is a form of selfishness. In giving in to your own madness and retreating, you forget the effect that your actions can have on others. In his and his daughter's reminiscing, John reveals the selfishness of his giving into his own needs at the cost of his duties to others. Though the situation with Kim is different, he understands that the effects of giving in to madness is a way to manipulate situations, and shows actually a remarkable amount of insight. He is an entirely different sort of alcoholic than 'Captain' Jack Boyle in *Juno and the Paycock*, whose alcoholism, rather than providing insight, only seems to provide an avenue into blindness, madness, and avoidance.

The other message that came across in the play is the importance of having someone to tell your story to. John's greatest revelation seems to be not his exposes of his troubled past, but instead his admission to Mark that he "needs someone to talk to". This vulnerability and need for someone to tell their stories to fit very well with the format of the play -- simple set, small audience, so that the characters, though they are ostensibly talking to each other, seem also to be talking to the audience. The play is framed like a series of monologues as each of the characters gets wrapped up in telling their own stories. Everyone needs someone to tell their story to.

Death and the Maiden

I like to think about this play as thinking about the trauma of loss of voice. The main character lost her voice by being subjected to a trauma that is so shameful she cannot speak about it -- or she can, but no one wants to hear it, so she silences herself. At the beginning, she seems disturbed that her husband's commission will only investigate cases of death. She, as she says, "is not dead". She's still there to talk about what happened to her, but thus far the country is interested only in listening to the relatives' stories of victims unable to speak. Therefore, those dead have more of an avenue for exposure than she does. Even within her marriage she seems to have lost her say, accusing her husband of not listening to her and not having power over his decisions, which greatly affect her life. Though he makes a big deal of caring about how his appointment affects her life, he only fakes asking her for her permission and accepts the commission without her.

When she says that the man he brought home is the one that tortured her, her husband does not believe her. I think she forces the man to confess as a way of stealing his voice because no one will listen to her own. *She* cannot tell her story and have it be believed, but he can, so she usurps his voice. Interestingly, through her husband's deception, the 'confession', whether true or not, is based directly on her story. It's her story and thus her voice, but through another vehicle. Still, she has not really regained her voice, because she still lacks the authority or the audience to tell it herself. When she was tortured, she was blind folded, not gagged. She could have screamed, begged for help, yet no one would have cared. She has not lost her voice physically, she has lost her audience.

When using the Doctor's voice to tell her story, she literally steals his voice. She gags him, then forces him to write a confession patterned after her own stories that she can use to silence *him* from then telling his own trauma of being tortured by her. She has silenced him in every way she can. Although she perpetrates the cycle of violence, she also perpetrates the cycle of oppression (which is itself a horrible form of violence and violation). The ambiguous ending is then very interesting. The staging that highlights her face (wearing an expression that was to me a cross between a grimace and a smirk) and the doctor highlights *either* the circle she has perpetuated or the futility of her efforts. If he really is there, it seems to me to indicate the cycle of revenge - she has tortured and oppressed him now, and thus he now haunts her and needs satisfaction over her. Conversely, it could also be because as she had to use his voice to tell her story, she didn't really overcome her oppression. She never regained her voice because in order to be believed, she had to use some one else's voice and authority as a vehicle. Thus, she is still haunted by the memory of her torture. In a way, she is still oppressed - she remains the backer of her husband's glory, mixing margaritas for his friends.

January 1st, 2012

Daily Events

This day I went with the group to the Eucharist Mass at Westminster Abbey. It was actually one of my favorite events of the trip. When the choir walked in, I teared up. Something about taking part of the beautiful ritual among such history touched me deeply. The beauty of the setting and the music is indescribable. I visited Westminster Abbey, along with other major attractions, when I was in London with my parents a few weeks previously (I would highly

recommend it as a place to go for future seminar participants), but something about the service and the music heightened the experience immeasurably.

Juno and the Paycock

The set was what really struck me about this play. The detail of the dilapidated grandeur was beautiful. To me, the set looked like an oil painting. Something about the detailing in the ripping and green-gray of the background managed to be at once realistic and also almost too-realistic – so finely detailed and clean as to give it a definitive, theatrical, heightened air. When the rich furnishings were brought in, the red of the furniture contrasted with the desaturated green-grey of the background to heighten the sense of unreality -- the markers of wealth and poverty looked like the sort of juxtaposition an artist would make, and of course that is what it was – it was the director's choice of juxtaposition.

I also appreciated the setting in a grand but dilapidated place. For me, this said something about the state of Ireland at the time, and about the state of Ireland's dreams. The movements had grand ideals which corroded and turned on themselves, people who turned on people and a nation with an extremely rich cultural history and sense of pride brought to its knees by infighting and conflicts.

The lighting in the play was also superb. I do not know as much about the mechanics behind the lighting as others on the trip, but I loved the way the shadows of the set corresponded to the lighting from the windows, and that the light changed in color and tone so that you could tell the time of day. The first act was during the middle of the day. Then it turned more towards sunset. And the last act, set two months later, was clearly more during the winter time. The

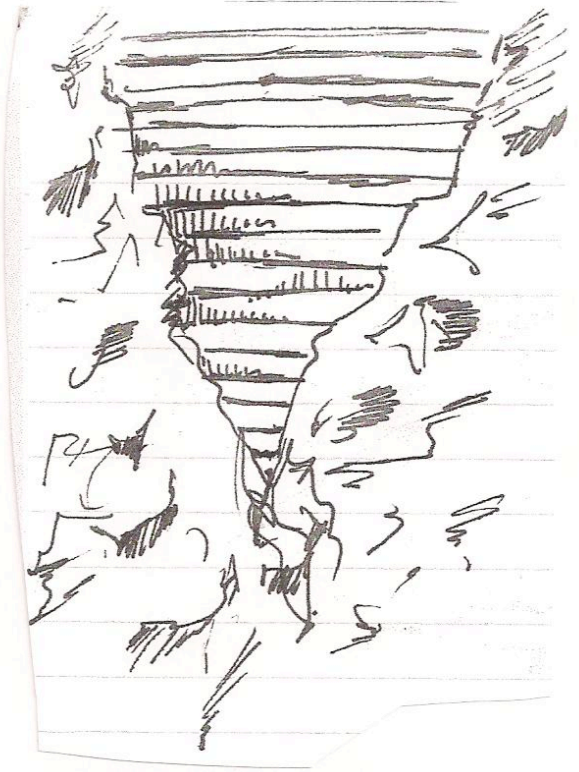
quality of the lighting added to the crispness of the visual, cleanly defining the chiaroscuro or the shadows and the lines of the characters' faces.

The play itself was incredibly moving. Upon exiting, I felt almost shellshocked. It seemed to provide no hope for Ireland, or at least, no hope for Ireland's *men*, who were at that time the primary leaders. The final scene shows the women of the play, Juno and Mary Boyle and even Mrs. Maisie Madigan, coming together and showing their true strength. Juno says to Mary that it will be better for her child to have two mothers instead of a father, and given the behavior of Jack Boyle, Joxer Daly, Mr. Bentham and even Johnny Boyle, I might have to say I'd agree. Johnny's behavior as a character, I'd have to say, disappointed me the most. At first, I romanticized him as a trauma victim whose family seemed not to understand the extent of his



Juno and the Paycock Set - Irish Tenement

psychological damage. In the end though, his treatment of Mary, which proved just as unsympathetic as the rest of the male characters, forced me to completely recast my mental assessment of his character. Instead of some heroic victim of the revolution, as he had played himself up to be throughout the play, he is instead the very figure of its failure – a revolutionary that turned on his own cause and cast down his sister, whom he had no real right to hold himself above. That is not to say that he was an entirely unsympathetic character – he *had* given a lot for Ireland. I'm not saying I think he deserved to be crippled or to be murdered. None of the revolutionaries did – but his behavior shows, in a way, the horror of the war. Neither side was right or wrong, and the ultimate tragedy of the civil war was that it caused the culture of Ireland to break down, as its independence 'heroes' revealed the ugly lengths they would go to for *their* vision of Ireland – destroying their Ireland in the process. This play really shows a very, very depressing image of the dissolution of old Ireland, degrading from the Ireland of the traditional music played during the party. While it does end with the somewhat hopeful note of the Boyle women rising from the ashes of their past, the final scene is of Captain Jack and Joxer, too drunk to see or stand.



Rip in the wall of the Paycock Set

January 2nd, 2012**Daily Events**

Today I went to the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery. I'm a bit of an art nerd, so I really enjoyed this. In the National Portrait Gallery, I particularly enjoyed the exhibit of 1960-modern portraits (there was an Andy Warhol of Mick Jagger and a large painting of Paul McCartney that I really liked from an artistic stand point) and the display of modern actresses. There was a portrait of Thandi Newton, whom we saw in *Death and the Maiden* in this exhibit, which was pretty neat.

Although the National Gallery has a large and fine collection of medieval works, I personally enjoyed the impressionist and post-impressionist display the most (just my personal preferences). I also bought a book there of Vincent Van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo which I read throughout the trip. It was particularly cool reading the parts about when Van Gogh was residing in Richmond, because we went there!

For lunch today, we ate at a really, really good falafel joint called Gaby's between Leicester Square Station and Trafalgar Square. I'd highly recommend it – it was the best falafel I have ever had (and the worker liked giving out free samples)!

Jerusalem

This was the only play for which I bought the script. I think what spoke to me the most was the sense of the loss of belief in something greater – the loss of the common mythology and of the connection to nature. Johnny Rooster Byron is connected to the old ways – he represents them. He remains connected to an entire lineage of Byrons, men with special blood. Whatever

happens to him at the end, he leaves behind his son, leaving a small measure of hope that the old ways are not completely forgotten.

The town's repudiation of Rooster, despite his history with its current leaders, shows the emptiness of post-modern industrialization. Maybe he was just a coke dealer living in the woods, but wiping him out wipes out his stories, his history, his legacy - the legacy of the great and the green. Of wise men telling stories. Of youth rebellion. He's much more than a coke dealer – he's a relic of times when losing yourself to substances was a religious, transcendent experience, when holidays like St. George's Day held on to the vestiges of the pagan rites of spring. He's a druid, living in a metal trailer in the woods. Peter Pan, with a constantly changing cast of lost boys.

The play therefore shows a loss in modern times, a loss of history, a loss of rootedness. We can make our homes everywhere, but do we really remember what it means to belong anywhere? We have lost the sense of our own ancestry and mythology – how, then, can we truly know who we are? When do we really look inside of ourselves, and confront what we see?

Throughout the play, though Rooster's constantly drunk and high, he can *see*. Unlike Jack Boyle, he doesn't become blind through drink. He can see things other people cannot - when he looks at Phaedra's stepfather, he sees things others don't seem to. His eyes hold something extraordinary, deep down, that he shows Dawn. He sees the mythology of old Britain, living amongst the inhabitants of the New Estate but wholly ignored. Though his cast of followers profess disbelief of his fantastical stories, his story telling skills hold a power of their own. Though no one says they believe his story about the mountain, no one wants to bang the drum either.

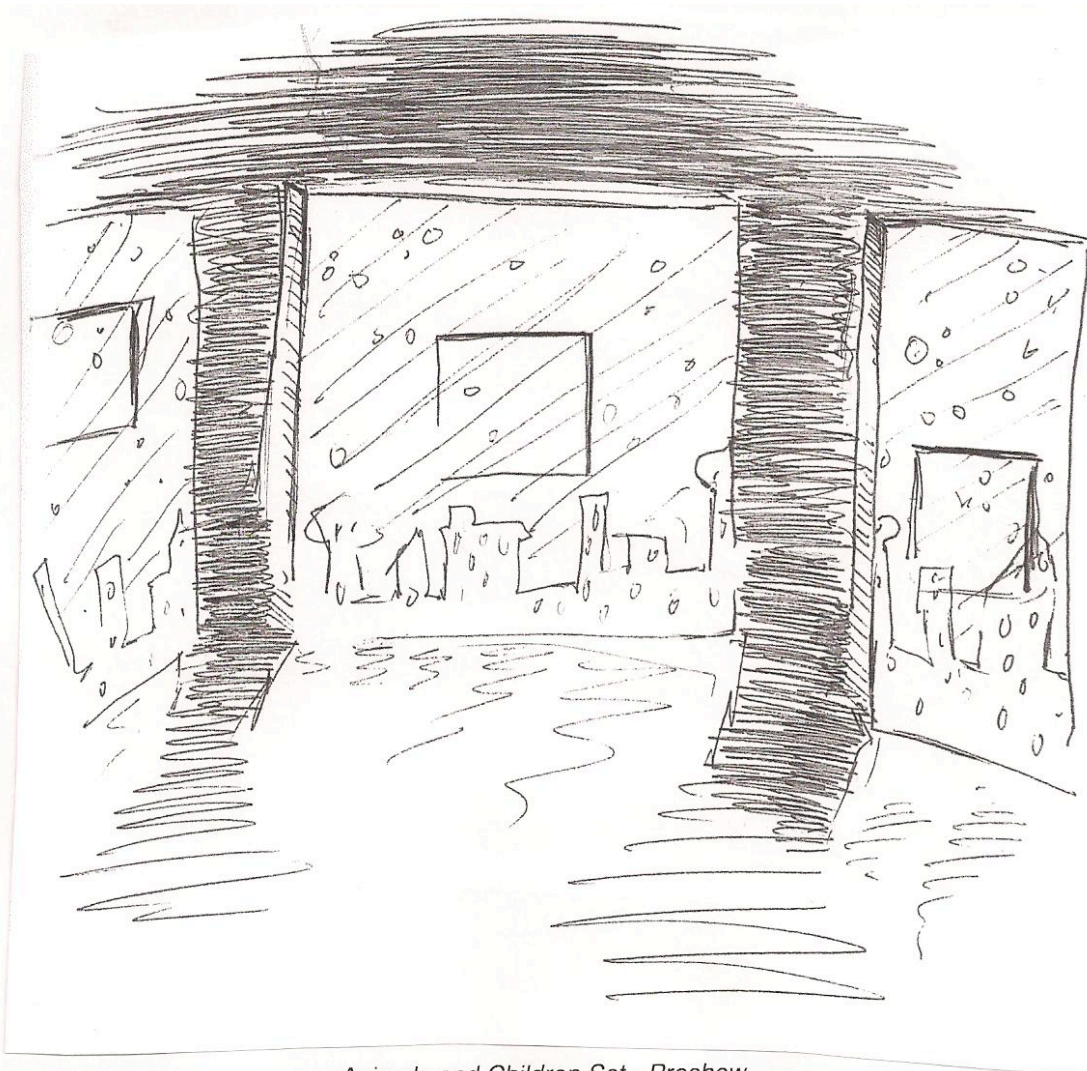
I wish I could see this play again so that I could remember it more clearly. As I said, I bought the script, but this play, like many, is so much better in performance. I loved that they recreated nature on the stage to the extent of live chickens and, I heard from my peers in the closer seats, insects. The thrown eggshells were real. The realism of the trees on stage, the lighting making it look as if they were outside. It was transporting.

Then, of course, the acting. Through a combination of the writing and the strong performance of the entire cast, this play never once lost my interest, though it was a three act affair. I believed in every actor in the play. Of course, Mark Rylance still stole the show. I could not imagine this play with someone else playing Byron. Conceptualizing the number of times he has given that performance, even thinking about how impressive it is that he is the only member of the cast without an understudy, is frankly quite hard to do. Getting these facts through my head is difficult because for me, I was not watching an actor – I was watching Johnny Rooster Byron. I completely lost the sense of an actor at all, because Mark Rylance became, and brought to life, Rooster. Believing in Rooster is absolutely essential, because his power lies in the innate connection to him that all of the townspeople seem to exhibit, escaping to him when they reach out in their youth for something outside of the establishment. If the audience cannot believe in him, then we lose the sense that we are connecting to our own cultural pasts, or at least that we have lost our cultural pasts. I believed in Mark Rylance – like Rooster was the magic in the play, he was the magic of the play.

January 3rd, 2012

Animals and Children

This show was fantastic in the way it toyed with reality. The set consisted of 3 screens and a series of projections. While *War Horse* was set in a space between imagination and reality, this seemed to forgo the use of the reality of the stage, and instead focused on bringing a fantasy to life. In this case, it was a series of fantastical animations that interacted with the actresses and the live music (with beautiful timing, I might add). The dramatic makeup of the actresses, with the dark lips and eyes and white faces, combined with the straight front lighting, had the effect of flattening them so that they too became like caricatures. It was wicked cool.



Animals and Children Set - Preshow

I also loved the fact that the music was live. Not only was it wonderful music, but the way that the live music interacted with the live actors and the drawn characters and fantastical story-line set the play in a sort of alternative universe.

Though the play was, as I posit, in an alternative universe, it dealt with some pretty serious themes actually - the core story-line revolves around the crushing of a youth rebellion and of classist oppression. And although the inventive way that the story was set removed it from the audience, the choice to have actresses dressed in cheetah print, as those in the Bayou tended to dress, roaming the audience before the start of the play brought the alternative universe *into* our universe. The revelation that the gumdrops (of which I personally ate quite a few) were a controlling substance was, though obviously they actually weren't, a bit of shock because I was so thoroughly transported into the world and the reality of the bayou.

The theme of children revolting, the idea of a youth rebellion, comes up in several of the other plays we watched. *Jerusalem* and *13* both dealt with ways in which the youth or the masses rebel, but I saw a parallel most strongly with *Matilda*. There, too, the wilder side of children comes out, though in the case of *Matilda*, the children triumph. Perhaps one way to think about the difference is that *Matilda* is a play about the importance of valuing the inner child, while *The Animals and the Children took to the Streets* is a play about how society forces that inner child out of us. Take the story lines of *Zelda* and *the Caretaker*. *Zelda* has dreams and aspirations, but comes, via the oppression of Granny's Gumdrops (instituted by the government) and the pressure of her mother, to accept only what society expects from her (which isn't very much). *The Caretaker* already seems broken down – but throughout the play we learn he dreams of two things – leaving the Bayou and Agnes Eaves. Yet in the end, he walks resolutely from idealism to

realism. Yet despite his rejection of idealism/the idealist ending, he still has the dream of leaving the Bayou at the end. Still, the audience is left with this mantra: *born in the Bayou, die in the Bayou*.

Reasons to be Pretty

I found this play to be very personally disturbing. Though not the most grotesque, not (in my opinion) the best acted or possessing the best set, it nonetheless hit me the hardest in a none-too-pleasant way. I think that this play was difficult to watch for me because it seemed to portray tragedy that I (and everyone) can readily see myself as trapped in, even one I help to propagate and construct. I guess the tragedy came from the fact that I could see, and have seen something very similar, to these exact events play out in real life. The characters are all trapped in a web of expectations that ultimately destroys their relationships and erodes their happiness. Even the thoroughly unsympathetic figure of Kent was, in a way, trapped in his role as the man who *needed* to have the prettiest girl on his arm, *needed* to be the head of the baseball team, *needed* to have a son, not a daughter. His wife was trapped in the idea that the father of her child *must* be the attentive, caring, husband of popular myth. Greg and Steph were likewise destroyed by expectations. Steph was trapped in the narrative that states that you must get married, be happy, have children. At the end, she comments that she knows that Greg was never going to give to her the kind of life she was wanting. Why was she wanting it? It seemed like they loved each other (despite their problems), yet it was not enough. She wanted the proof of their commitment to society. She wanted him to sweep her off her feet like a movie and for him to look at her like she were an angel, ignoring her faults, ignoring that maybe she isn't gorgeous. In saying that she was "regular" he shattered the illusion of that expectation. She says that it hurt so much because it

was “true”, because “he believed it.” Perhaps in uttering the “truth” (though beauty is very, *very* subjective) he forced her to see that she was never going to get what she wanted with him – though she doesn’t seem to see that there’s any sort of fallacy in that, which to me is horribly tragic and horribly realistic. She is utterly trapped by her own expectations for her life -- yet expectations dictated by whom? For whom?

I kept hoping for something from Greg. I’m not sure what, but I kept expecting him to be the character that broke through the web, or who redeemed himself in some way. Not that, as a girl, I didn’t think his comments about Steph weren’t hurtful, but he seemed to be the character most able to understand or see through the webs around them. Perhaps it’s that in not understanding why Steph had to be conventionally pretty for him to love her, I saw him as transcending that ideal, albeit in a clumsy and unaware fashion. His continued capitulation in the second act regarding her looks, therefore, for me was disappointing. I think however that this is my own personal opinions intruding upon the world of the play. I recognize that as a character, he wishes to learn about himself and about his world and that learning to recognize Steph’s beauty is part of that journey – I just wish he had gone further.

Maybe Steph needed his reassurance for her self esteem, but I think that what she really needed was to stop caring about her looks. Steph and Greg’s relationship becomes defined by the question of her looks, when really she ought to value herself as much more than that. Greg seems almost unable to explain why he likes her, though, to her, and thus feebly reiterates to her that “she looks good.” It seems less to me like a heartfelt statement of admiration than an inability for him to express what he truly likes about her, so he appropriates her cramped views and demands to define her because he is unable to break her out of her shell. However, I think that his actions

were very realistic – rendering his ultimate shortcoming both understandable and heartbreaking. He is a good person, but ultimately trapped by expectations and surroundings like the other characters.

As for the production itself, I think my biggest quibble was actually that I kept getting pulled out of the performance and reminded that it *was* a performance. For one, the stage fighting was too obviously staged, as was the slap. In addition, the choice of the songs in the scene changes pulled me out of the play. I do not know if it was because they are songs I know, or that they were really loud, or some other factor, but I kept thinking about Queen and not the play. In talking to others I have come to understand them as perhaps an exploration or representation about how popular music, like movies, can construct these sort of entrapping social myths, and some of the songs (such as *Don't Stop me Now* and *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*) seemed to be very particularly chosen. Still, it took me too long and too much thought to understand this for it to have worked for me during the performance.

While I may seem overwhelmingly negative here, other than the preceding paragraph my comments are not necessarily criticism, but just comments. In fact, I do think the play was brilliantly written – all the more so because it was so disturbing to me. It broke my heart, partially because I saw and can see myself as trapped in much the same ways. Labute, tragically, gives us no out at the the end. With this reading in mind, I am very glad the director chose to cut the last scene of the script. It wraps up the play too well, neatens up the plot, fits the archetype of a romantic comedy too well. I wanted Greg to realize the power and freedom he gave Steph by not defining her by her appearance (though of course, that's not what she wants), and the last written scene just cements his definition of her by her own image conscious terms.

Jan 4th, 2012

Daily Events

Today was the day we went to Stratford-upon-Avon. As a Shakespeare enthusiast, this was an awesome experience. After visiting Shakespeare's birthplace, which was wicked cool, I went and ate at the Garrick, the oldest pub in Stratford. I ate rather hurriedly because I wanted to make sure to get to Trinity Church, where I saw Shakespeare's grave and which is also a lovely church. It was an extremely valuable pilgrimage of sorts to be able to visit Shakespeare's birthplace and burial place and then go and see a fabulous production by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Measure for Measure

I thought that this was one of the more brilliant Shakespeare adaptations I have yet seen. The directorial choices fit so well with the contents of the original play, and the production really illustrated and emphasized main themes of the play.

First of all, the BDSM costumes. At first, it was a bit jarring to see Shakespeare performed by dominatrices. Yet the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. BDSM plays with the sexual control of people, which is, of course, the subject of the play - the controlling of sex. It made the sexualization of all of the characters immediately apparent, as well as bringing the struggles of power and the power of sex to the forefront of the audiences' attention immediately.

Furthermore, I loved the directorial choice to use women as lamps and as fountains (in Marianna's garden). I took that as a comment on the way women are used within the play. They are objects, very much like when they are used as set pieces and furniture. Although Isabella has

a measure of agency in her skill with words and her power over Angelo, she only ever acts at the bequest of men – first Lucio, then the Friar/Duke. As soon as Angelo begins to be swayed by her, as soon as she robs his careful control of his emotions, he immediately takes steps to control *her* sexually. Although she does have a considerable role within the play, she never acts for her own bequest, and in the end is married to the Duke rather than following her originally intended path – one that would have put her outside of male control or even male contact. Throughout the play, women are used as sex objects and as pawns in a political game (though to be fair, men are as well, but they at least have others under them that they control even as they are controlled by others).

In addition, the portrayal of the Duke was brilliant. Brilliantly acted, and brilliantly directed. His magic tricks fit very well with the the almost magical manipulating he does throughout the play, and the long, drawn out ending. Upon his return he could simply have confronted Angelo and brought out Claudio. Instead, however, he carefully stages a dramatic, drawn out resolution that takes about fifteen minutes more than it really needs to. With his love of showmanship and magic, his need to control and to appear some sort of magician, however, his dramatic staging and procrastination make sense. At the beginning of the play, the actor himself cued the lights to come up and the music to dim, thus demonstrating his need to manipulate the setting. His expression as he did this, a sort of winning, self pleased smile, demonstrated his need to be loved and to amaze as well. His desire to be liked also fits with the gift of his power to Angelo. He wants the law to be upheld, but he doesn't want to be the one punishing the people because he wants to be loved by the people.

Finally, I particularly enjoyed the staging of the scene where the pimp accuses members of the audience as fellow sexual depravers. Not only was it hilarious, but the personal accusations and inclusion of the audience also illustrated a theme of the play: everyone has sex, so a law forbidding it is folly when the lawmakers themselves have sex. As everyone has it, condemning people would be pure hypocrisy as it puts the lawmakers in a compromised position. It is natural, unavoidable, and pervasive, so how can we condemn it?

The Heart of Robin Hood

Although this play did not contain as much acrobatics as I had hoped, I was not, in the end, disappointed. The set itself was quite spectacular. The beautifully constructed tree, which came alive with little twinkly lights, seemed to really fit the theme of escaping the corruptions of civilization into the forrest. The set illustrated that the forest was a magical place. As soon as you entered the theater, you were confronted with a huge tree branch, high up in the stage space, dominating your vision and your imagination. I know I immediately began wondering why the



The Heart of Robin Hood Set: The Tree

ropes were there and trying to find all of the platforms. Then the musicians began playing and I realized that they were *in* the tree, bringing it to life.

I also thought it was interesting the way this play twisted the myth to make Marian the main character. Although I am not as familiar with the earlier myths as you no doubt are, Professor Peck, I gather from my discussion with Pam that the original Robin Hood myths were far darker than the one we know now. I liked that this version managed to integrate the darker side of the hero of Sherwood forrest with the modern, and that it did it in a way that was both gory and (semi) appropriate for children. I myself was rather shocked at the murder of the clergyman - I was *certain* that it was Friar Tuck, and then all of a sudden he had a dagger in his forehead. I was completely shocked. In retrospect, though, I think that this shock was necessary to alert the audience to let go of their expectations – this was not the familiar story, and mentally treating it as such would have altered the perception of the play.

Though it was gory, the special effects were pretty easy to see through. Many people reacted most strongly to the ripping out of the tongue, but for me the hanging was the most graphic simply because it was truly a man hanging from the ceiling in a noose – he conceivably could have been hung in front of us. The harness that they used, however, was bright red, making the stagecraft allowing the mock-hanging easy to see, and the actor later came back as an apparition from heaven. This production wasn't a show just for kids, but it was a show that kept a younger audience in mind.

Knowing the tradition of pantomime definitely helped me to understand this play better, especially the figure of Pierre, who functions as the Buttons figure. Some of the other features of the productions seemed to parallel as well – for example, the immersion of the actors

underwater and the subsequent spraying of the audience upon their resurfacing. I do not know if the integration of the animals/musicians is a panto parallel, but it was another kid and adult friendly element that I found particularly cool. On a spectacle level, it was just awesome, and on a theme level, it reminded me both of the emphasis on animality in *War Horse* and, in a different way, of the version of *Robin Hood* that many children are most familiar with – the Disney version, in which *all* of the characters are animals. I also thought it was interesting the way the instruments were used and characterized as animals – the boar/cellist was my favorite. Using a trumpet for a swan was somewhat predictable, but a cello as a boar? I never would have thought of it, but it worked very well in my opinion. That was a lot of this production for me – things I would have thought of differently, like the myth of *Robin Hood*, but which I enjoyed and was interested by primarily because they were not what I would have expected.

Written on the Heart

The most interesting aspect of this play for me was the attention given to the power and effect of language. The opening scene, in which the representatives from different powerful factions within the church at the time of the play's setting, featured these powerful, learned men debating over tiny, seemingly insignificant words. Yet they are right – though the topic of their heated debates are single words, those words could have a major effect on how the prescriptions are interpreted. That is what makes literature in translation so difficult, and when you are translating the “word of God” – well, the stakes are about as high as they can be.

In translating the Bible from Latin into the vernacular, the “one” voice of God, interpreted and passed down by a unified church, was fractured. If every plow boy can read and understand the Bible for himself, then every plow boy has the opportunity to decide for himself

what it means. With every linguistic structure there is a possibility that people obtain slightly different meanings and connotations – what is written on my heart may not be written on yours. There's a power, therefore, in letting people decide for themselves what they believe, but there's also a danger – a danger to the established religion. I thought it was very interesting how, in this depiction, though William Tyndale wanted every man to be able to read the Bible for himself, and said that any English Bible would do, he nonetheless wanted *his* version to be the one people read. He wanted to influence the form of the church the same as the rest of the men. In the King James Bible, then, the men of the church almost took back the power of language. They translated it into refined English, taking it back from the people but adding an element of majesty. Is the word of God supposed to touch our hearts through its message or the form of the message? It is a debate that continues today, through the many forms of the Christian faith.

I liked that this play showed the debate over the translation of the Bible and the form of the English church through the years, with scenes from characters' pasts and their presents so that time itself became pretty fluid, thus highlighting the duration of this debate. I did sometimes get confused by the time period switches, and which character was whom in a later life. Once I realized that the props held the key to character continuity, however, I was able to follow the play better. As *Dublin Carol* and *Juno and the Paycock* made me wish I knew more Irish history, this play made me wish I knew more British history – I think I would have gotten more out of the production had I known a little more of the history. I knew enough of the background to get most of the action and realize the significance of the characters, but I'm sure that I lost some of the nuances that educated British audience members were able to pick up on.

I did have a serious problem with some of the staging, however. As our seats were on the side, I missed entire key scenes. I could hear the dialogue, true, but I could not see the actors at all. I think that this play could have been better staged for theater in the round. I also feel that while the story and script was very interesting and the acting superb, this play did not gain much from being a play. With most of the other plays we saw, I felt that having an audience present, and having the story tangibly produced on stage, added an element of meaning to the story – whether it was toying with the expectations of setting and imagination/reality, the sheer spectacle or some other element, a key factor of the play was that it was a play. With this production, I did not really feel that having the action right in front of me added anything. If anything, this felt almost more like a movie to me. I feel like this story and production style would be better suited to film, because then elements such as the fluid way the play moved through time could be more clear, the character continuity could be more clearly denoted, and the staging would not be an issue. I suppose what I'm saying is that I really liked the script on an intellectual level, but I do not think I would have gotten any less from simply reading the script or from watching this play on screen, while I do feel that a play such as, say, *Jerusalem*, would be an entirely different matter as a movie and is very different as a script.

Jan 5th, 2012

Daily Events

Sara and I ate lunch today with (you) Professor Peck at Belgo. These were, without a doubt, the best mussels that I have ever had in my life. I'm hungry just thinking about them.

Excellent recommendation. We also went and found Neal's Yard, which is a tiny little hidden

alley that is all painted in happy, pastel colors, and went to Neal's Cheese Shop, where the obliging shop keeper was very liberal with the samples of fabulous English cheese!

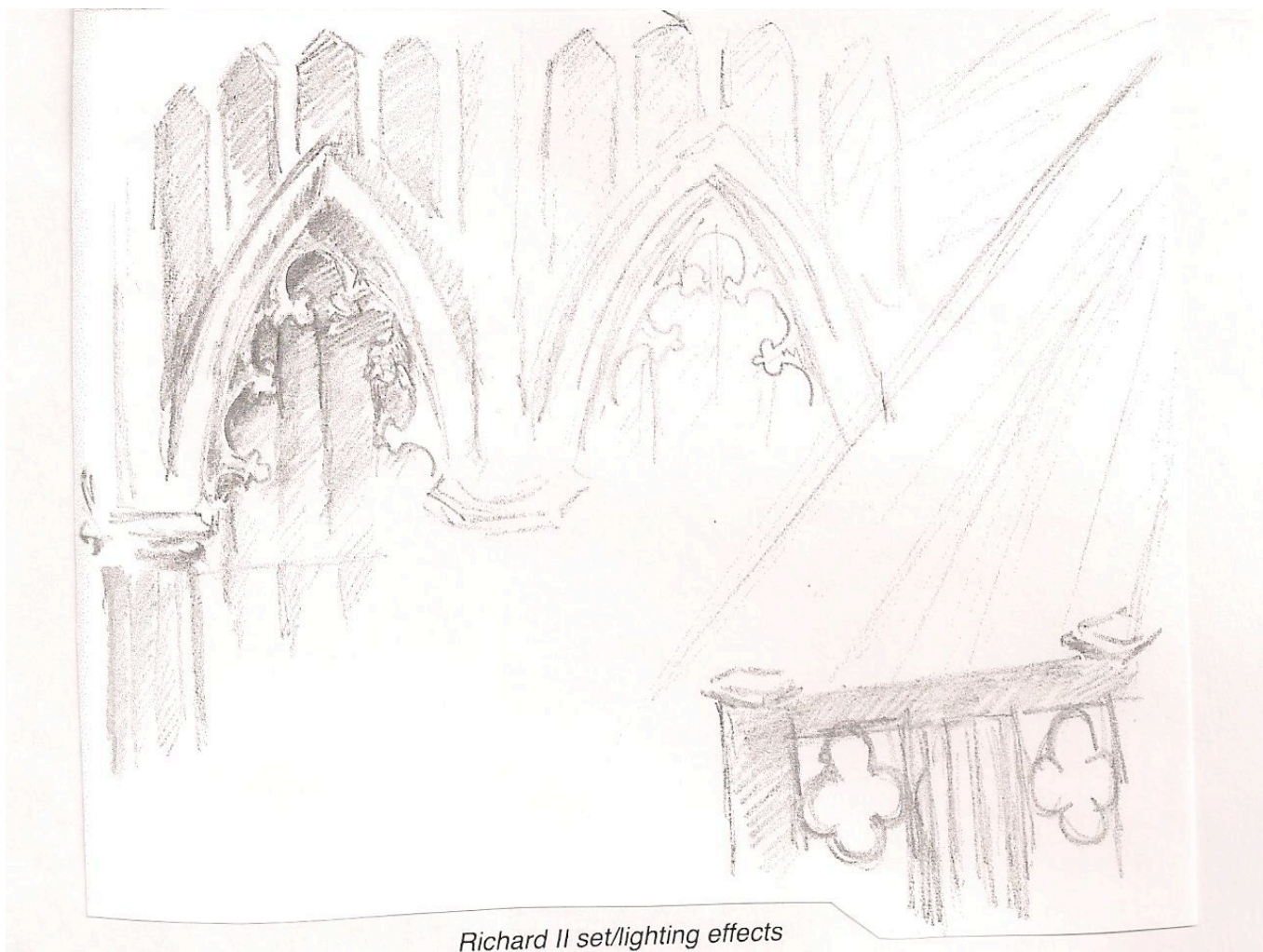
Richard II

Eddie Redmayne as Richard II made this play for me. The language of the play was obviously beautiful and affecting (I like Shakespeare, so it was almost a given that I would enjoy the script), but what really struck me was the acting. I thought that Eddie Redmayne portrayed Richard II very well, first as somewhat young, yet still regal, and then in the end as a broken monarch, trying to deal with the decomposition of a personality he had been raised to believe he needed to embody. He seemed very concerned with appearing regal, as a King might be. His final speeches were very affecting – they moved me to tears. Throughout, I believed him as King by right. Perhaps Bolingbroke was a better ruler or leader (he certainly seemed a heartier, more substantial person and probably more accomplished warrior than twiggy, well-dressed Richard in this production), but I could see how Richard believed with all his heart that he was the ordained King. Ability did not matter (his leadership abilities played very little role in this play) so much as godly right.

At first, I was somewhat hesitant to grant Richard my loyalty (as I knew how the story had to turn out historically), but by the end he had my allegiance completely. It was interesting pairing this play with *Richard III*, which I read earlier in the year. I therefore had some background into the end of the conflict, and the dire pronouncements at the end of this play were especially interesting, given my recent readings of the lamentations at the end of *Richard III*. I feel like someone who is judging a book by the first and last chapters, so while I have a pretty

good idea of what happens in between – who lives, who dies, who really badly needs a horse – I think I need to read the middle now to finally have the full picture. *Henry IV* and *V*, here I come.

I think the production did a particularly good job of bringing in the divine right to rule. Bolingbroke is not necessarily a bad king, he even could be argued to be a good one, but *he* didn't have the divine right. Richard did, and that is why his deposition was such a crime (Shakespeare's original audience would have believed this, and I felt like this production made a modern audience believe this to some extent as well). Placing Richard in pure white at the beginning and the staging of the play within a cathedral filled with incense both emphasized the divinity of Richard (along with the play's language) and thus emphasized the horror of his



deposition. The first image we receive of the play is Richard in pure white, upon the throne and in a cathedral, silent and still despite the racket of the audience all around him. It is a pervasive image, one that further reinforces the theme of divine right. This emphasis made special sense after class, knowing the extraordinarily symbolic nature of Richard's birth.

I also liked the way light was used in this play. Shining the light through the smoky fog created religious, regal shafts of light as one might get in religious symbolism or in a cathedral, yet for me also created a definitive space in which the play was taking place. Unlike some of the other plays we have seen, I felt that the stage here was a very separate place from the audience (though the actors were at times very close to the audience). It fit, in this play, with the period dress and historical drama, thus removed from us. I also noticed that, in the chipped and worn paint job (which must have been terribly difficult to produce) there were patches of gold on the floor. Interestingly, in the regal scenes or the scenes involving being in the court, the light was shone sideways so that the gold glistened. When they were supposed to be on land or in the dueling court, light was shone directly down so that the gold did not shine out. The way the light created defined spaces in the air created a slightly separate, almost-touchable but distant space for the action of the play.

No Way Out (Huis Clois)

Though this play was simply set, had a four man cast and contained little by the way of spectacle, I was riveted throughout, and I spied relatively few sleepers in the audience. Every actor delivered an inspired performance – there was not a weak link among them. The attention to detail in the performances was astounding - after Garcin remarks to the Valet (played by Thomas Padden) that he doesn't blink, I started trying to match the Valet blink for blink.

Eventually I gave up - my vision was going dark (as naturally occurs when photoreceptors use up their supply of rhodopsin and don't get a chance to refresh). I kept watching him though. He was going an extraordinarily long time between blinks, and whenever he did he did it while shifting his gaze so as to hide the action. It is such a small detail, but it was maintained.

Sartre's dialogue fairly crackles throughout the play. This was definitely a play that made me think. Rather than Dante's punishing layout of concentric circles, Sartre's hell is brilliantly simple: three people, perfectly apportioned to punish each other, stuck in a room together for all eternity. "*L'enfer, c'est les autres*" or "hell – it's other people". Is it any other people? Would any three people, stuck in this room together and expecting torture, make each other their torturers? Maybe. I'm not quite sure, honestly – because on one hand, these three personalities and histories were perfectly designed to torture each other, so that each is psychologically tortured equally by the others and equally psychologically tortures the others. This would suggest that the "they" Inez speaks of really have planned out this unique hell. On the other hand, what if they hadn't expected to be tortured? Would they have proceeded in the same way? Would any triumvirate, expecting to find torturers, turn themselves into the perfect trio of torturers? I do not know. The idea of expectation is very interesting in the way this scenario plays out, of course. Does the "they" really exist, or do the characters bring "them" into existence by expecting some sort of punishing higher power? And if hell is other people, what is heaven? Solitude? I feel as though that would be a different sort of hell.

Leaving existential philosophy debates behind, I do think that this production did a good job of integrating the audience into the torture chamber. The way that the audience surrounded the stage and the actors, how close we were to them, I felt almost as if I was in the room with

them. As they commented on the room getting warmer and warmer, I began to feel uncomfortably hot as well – the way they arranged the lights, I think, was designed to raise the inner temperature of the stage as the play continued. Again, the attention to such small details, details you barely notice, made this play seamless. Also, as the play continued, I too began to wonder, like the characters, how it would end. If Garcin, Estelle and Inez were doomed to spend an eternity torturing themselves in that room, would we, the audience (who like them, cannot exactly just get up and walk out – we are as invested in the performance as Garcin is in Inez’s approval, and thus though we are not locked in, we cannot leave) be stuck there with them? Towards the end of the play, I was still interested, but I was also wondering how in the world it would end. Had this been staged in a large, impersonal theater, I do not believe I would have felt this way.

The final detail I wish to touch on is the absence of mirrors in the room. I believe that Estelle is the one who points it out due to her need to check her own appearance, but given the nature of the torture in the play, I think it was an important detail. Inez tells Estelle that she (Inez) will be Estelle’s mirror. She means Estelle to use the reflections in her eyes, but this also highlights the way all of the characters are each other’s psychological mirrors. Without the ability to look themselves in the eye and hide behind their own appearances and false-self affirmations, they are forced to use the others, and the others’ opinions, to define themselves. It is an interesting concept – because their solitary self is taken away, they are dependent on the others to define themselves. They are, in a way, almost dependent on the other two’s gaze and psychologically torturous effects for existence. If a conventional mirror would be a pleasant or familiar portrait, the reflection of themselves they get from the others is a true glimpse into their

selves, becoming a sort of *Portrait of Dorian Gray* of the inner selves that they would not want to confront.

Jan 6th, 2012

Cinderella

“I get to say the words my husband and me”. I was thoroughly enjoying my first panto experience until the very end, when Cinderella uttered this line. Really? Is that what she gets from this experience? Of course, I realize this play was intended for children mostly, not for feminist-leaning twenty-year-olds, but still. Is this really the message we want to send young girls? Cinderella’s accomplishment is not escaping her wicked stepsisters or even meeting the love of her life, it is *merely getting married*. Could she then have just married poor Buttons? He would willingly have married her and seems like he would have treated her very well, but he is instead rather harshly friend-zoned. The Prince, at least, rejoices that he has found his true love, valuing Cinderella (at whatever level) for herself. Cinderella’s utterance completely devalues the Prince as an individual. This is not a healthy message for children of either gender.

Despite my (probably irrationally) huge objection to this one line, I thought it interesting that this version followed more of the Donkey-Skin variant of Cinderella than the traditional version in that she had a father, instead of a step-mother (where was she, I wonder?) . She also gives up her invitation to the ball for the sake of her father, which Bettelheim would no doubt attribute to an oedipal father-daughter relationship. Despite what Bettelheim would say, I did think it interesting that this version, unlike so many other popular modern versions, focused on the father-daughter relationship instead of expunging it from the narrative. It was a pretty tame version in terms of malevolent authority figures, as Cinderella’s father seems unaware of the

punishment her stepsisters inflict upon his daughter, but one does wonder how he can be that clueless and what his motivation is to give his money to his stepdaughters and not to his daughter? Why do they get to spend all of the money?

This was a play comparatively lacking in female characters if you consider the addition of Buttons and the removal of the Stepmother, plus the fact that the stepsisters were both played by men. They *were* female characters, however, and both larger than life. Their costumes were feats of architecture in and of themselves (the same could be said of Beatrice's eyelashes). This play, being panto, obviously relied a lot on spectacle. Everything was overdone – from the costumes, to the stepsisters' histrionics, to the glittery set, to the ridiculously long busy bee scene. I really enjoyed it – it was an interesting contrast to the dramas we'd been seeing. From the sound of the pantomime a few members of the class went to earlier in the course and the explication in class, however, this one was actually pretty tame. I wasn't sprayed with any water guns, but it was still glossy and glittery and over the top. Nonetheless, it was fun to sing along to the songs (which, as they were from popular and classic musicals, I think I was actually more likely to recognize than modern pop music) and to interact with the characters. It reminded me very much of something like Disney-On-Ice, campy and fun for both children and adults who don't take themselves too seriously. I did notice that they interspersed adult humor into the script and production as well, though I think their one political joke fell flat (at an evening or weekend performance there would doubtless be more parents and thus more adults who would understand – our group simply did not know enough). I am very glad we got the opportunity to see a pantomime.

The Charity that Began At Home

I thought that this play was hilarious. Although the script and idea were funny, the acting was hilarious. I particularly thought the way Shuna Snow's acting and the production turned Miss Triggs into a complete caricature was hilarious. The costume choice, with the beady little glasses and the stuffy black dress, and the dour hairstyle, made her the very image of the unsuccessful governess from hell. Her hunched over, awkward gallumping as she walked and how she peered when she was even just standing, the way she pursed her lips, all of these turned her into such a comically unpleasant figure; I started laughing practically whenever she moved.

As funny as she was (and the other caricatured guests were almost as funny), Mr. Verreker was even more amusing. I don't know how he did it, but the faces that Oliver Gromm made stole the show. I do not mean that he was making random faces at the audience or the cast, but that his expressions were so comical and overdone, yet completely appropriate for whatever absurdity was occurring in the plot that even when he was not the center of attention, I was probably staring at him to see what he would do. Even when he was not a part of the main action he continued to react to what was being said in almost the same way I wanted to react. He was like the friend that you don't want to invite places because they refuse to hide their true opinions in a politically correct way, but that you invite anyways because they make every situation more amusing (and because they are willing to be rude and say what needs to be said when you aren't willing to).

I thought that Mr. Verreker, though he was one of the Dreadful Unwanted Guests, was actually the most sympathetic character in the play. While you could argue that Margery was the main character, or at least the driving force within the play's actions, throughout the play her

goodness becomes tiresome. As a character, she refuses to listen to anyone besides Mr. Hylton and utterly refuses to change. The only character that actually does exhibit growth during the play is Mr. Verreker.

Although he is not the most morally upright of characters, he is possibly one of the more human of the characters in the play. His final sacrifice is therefore all the more powerful – although I knew that Margery and Mr. Hylton would have been far happier together, I was pulling for Mr. Verreker. True, Margery's pestering was annoying to him, but his convincing her to break off the engagement for his good, though it was really for her sake, well – it shows both that he as a character has changed, and that he is very good at manipulating situations. In a way, his pseudo-reformation is the only good we actually witness Margery doing. Her and her mother's other charities (that we see in the play) certainly fall a bit short of the mark.

I also found the character of Mr. Hylton interesting. He espouses policies of great charity that Margery and her mother enact (to their own detriment sometimes), yet we do not ever see him in the play make any sacrifices (other than giving Margery and Verreker his blessing when he clearly loves Margery, but I feel that this is a different sort of sacrifice). When Soames endangers the women of the Denison household, Mr. Hylton is unwilling to make room in his own household to hire him, though apparently he would have the money to. And why does Soames get a second chance, when Ansom, the maid, has to be dismissed because she is pregnant? It appears there are limits to their charity, and I am not sure I agree that they are the correct limits.

January 7th, 2012

Daily Events

Today I spent a few hours at the British Museum, exploring their Greek and Roman Exhibits. Politics aside, I think that if you cannot get to Greece the British Museum must be the next best substitute – their collection of classical treasures is unbelievable.

Billy Elliot: the Musical

I don't know what I was expecting from this show– a coming of age, fairytale-esque story about overcoming adversity and gender roles, I suppose – but I was certainly not expecting a play deeply rooted in the union politics of Thatcher-era Britain. I thought it was very interesting the way this production interwove the storylines, particularly in the “Solidarity” number when the little girls and Billy were dancing in tandem with the mineworkers and police-men, who were engaged in a very different sort of dance with each other. As one of the songs stated, “we were born to boogie”. I thought that the way the police-men/mineworker conflict became a dance pointed out how a form of dance, an overtly or subliminally choreographed motion, could arguably be taking place even in the most unlikely of ways.

The set of this play was really, *really* cool. Billy's bedroom came out of the stage floor and receded back down, the bathrooms pulled out of the wings, the walls came out and receded depending on where the action was taking place in the play. Through the moving set, one stage was able to quickly and fluidly become a myriad of locations within the setting. After seeing this play I saw the movie, and the movie has a similar diversity of setting. In a movie, however, this is not at all unusual and with cameras and scene splicing, is a fairly easy effect to achieve. In a play, however, this sort of moving set requires a lot more design and for the scene switches to be

built into the action of the production so that they do not disrupt it. In this production, the rolling sets, pulled out by actors, usually, almost became a dancer in its own right.

In both *Billy Elliot* and in *The Animals and the Children took to the Streets*, a lower class child aspires to dreams that have been appropriated by the upper classes. In *The Animals and the Children took to the Streets*, Zelda states that she and her pirates “Want what you have” – they, too, want to feast on milk and honey, instead of fish heads. Zelda does not want to become a pawnbroker. Billy, likewise, wants to dance. It is a reasonable dream for either a girl or a wealthy boy, but not for a boy from a mining background. He, like Zelda, is probably expected to follow in his father and brother’s footsteps and become a miner. Yet Billy ultimately gains the support of his family and his community. Because all of their money helps him to leave the town and make it to London (a feat that, had he been on his own, would be almost as difficult as leaving the Bayou), he becomes a sort of emissary for the community, carrying all of their hopes. The children of the Bayou, by contrast, receive no support from their community. When they are drugged and dampened, the people of the Bayou agree that it is a “massive improvement”. Without support, their dreams are crushed.

Yet despite the hopeful note of Billy’s success and his escape from the dying community, the show does not precisely end happily. The community *is* dying, and the show is as much about them as it is about Billy. The final scene of the crushed and defeated miners, descending singing into the mines, is one of almost hopelessness. They are descending in more ways than one, and the final “thud” of them reaching the bottom has a ring of finality to it. Although they stuck together and believed that they had right on their side, they were defeated – they can no longer believe in their cause because it failed. It almost reminds me of the end of *Juno and the Paycock*,

where the independence cause has become so corrupted that it lost its inspirational quality. Here, the power of the collective had lost its power to inspire, and the men know it.

Billy, who could not have gotten into the Royal Ballet School without the support of the community around him, is left alone. He then walks out, alone, out through the audience. If this is a coming of age narrative, I would say that that is when he is finally forced to grow up. The movie ended with a flash-forward scene showing Billy's success, dancing the male lead of *Swan Lake*. Though this ending was less triumphantly happy, I thought that it left a tenor of the true difficulties that Billy and his community would be facing. It was not necessarily sad or happy, but it was a *beginning*, while the movie's ending is unequivocally an *end*.

Twelfth Night

This is one of my favorite Shakespeare plays, so I had pretty high expectations. I thought it was interesting the way this play used the actors as the set. The physicality of the set, with the actors working as the tree or the prison or the waves, worked really well with the overt sexual appetites in this portrayal. Maria and Olivia in particular were more sexualized than I would have imagined, though every actor exaggerated their characters' sexual appetites. Malvolio seemed to be lusting more after Olivia's body than her money, while Viola/Cesario professed her love of Duke Orsino directly after he flashed her. Maria was especially delightful as a sexually free, dynamically tiny mastermind. In this production she clearly controlled Sir Toby and Sir Andrew through a combination of brains and breasts. When reading the play, I typically get a tad distracted during this satiric comedy subplot, but in this production it was actually one of my favorite elements. It was just ridiculous and funny. The actors did satiric, slapstick comedy very well – for example, when Malvolio is reading the letter and Maria, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew

throw themselves into the shape of a tree to hide. It was absurd, but also one of the funniest moments in the play.

Olivia was an unusually strong force in this production. Cesario barely escapes her clutches – though the Kate Sawyer as Viola towered over Derval Mellet as Olivia, Olivia managed to physically dominate Cesario, cornering her/him in corners and clearly controlling the situations. It seemed as if Cesario's secret would be revealed graphically when Olivia tore off his pants. Of course, as soon as Sebastian replaces Cesario, that appears to be what happens. Though he clearly goes willingly, he stumbles back onto the stage disheveled and confused, out of control. Olivia then emerged, clad only in a sheet, but more in command of herself and of him than he is. She clearly held the power (I think she was also the better actress).

I also wish to touch briefly on Malvolio in the final scene. He became such a pitiful character there, leaning on his brace as a crutch, disheveled and defeated. He *had* been wronged and treated badly. Compared with the frightening, thumping zealot of the rest of the play, this final Malvolio was completely deflated. I thought that Gareth Fordred did a very good job of inspiring the audiences' pity here.

I do not think, however, that this production was of quite of the same caliber as all of the other productions we have seen. The acting was simply not as good. I enjoyed seeing their use of a black box stage and the actors themselves as props, but because we had been seeing so many absolutely top notch productions, it was more apparent to me where this one was woodenly or over-acted. Shai Matheson as Duke Orsino came off as a bit spastic, and Viola seemed to have one expression: a grimace. While Gareth Fordred as Malvolio arguably could have been overacting, I really liked the way he made the audience uncomfortable during his soliloquy while

reading Olivia's letter. He got very close to us, staring us down, pointing at people specifically when he was fantasizing about accusing Sir Toby and Sir Andrew (I personally was accused of being an alcoholic). Even in this speech, the super-sexual influences of this production came out. When he talks about how, as head of Olivia's household in marriage instead of just in occupation, he would sit and play with his "jewels", Fordred made a suggestive masturbatory motion. It's not explicitly in the Shakespeare, but it's not *not* in it either. This production just played the sexual drive up so that it became the motivating force behind all aspects of the plot.

January 8th, 2012

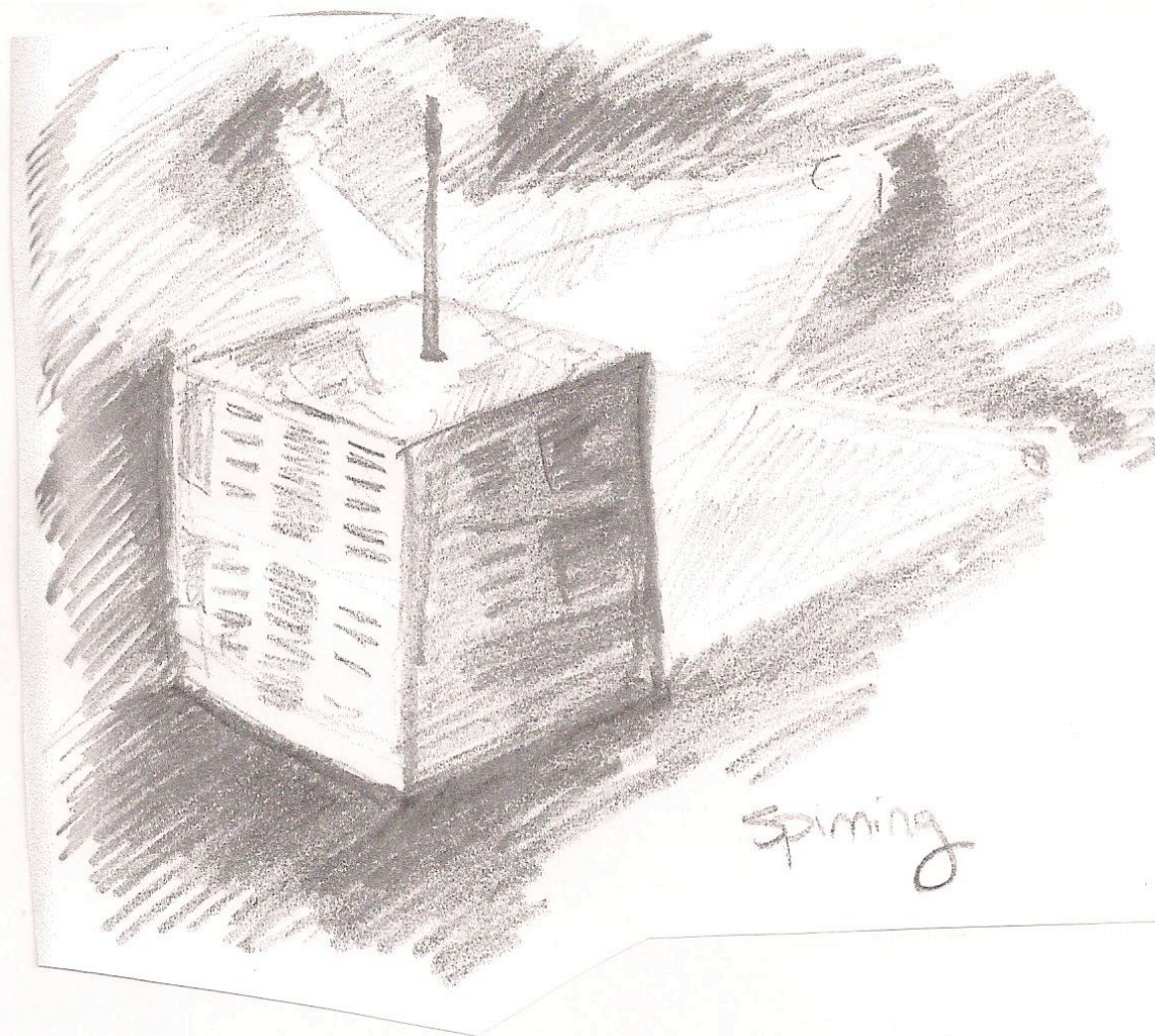
Daily Events

Today I went back to the Tate Modern. I say "back" because it was one of the places I went with my parents when I was in London previously, and it was one of my particular favorites. Something about the way they lay out their exhibits and the pieces they chose really brought me to appreciate contemporary art for the first time. To me, the experience is encapsulated in a quote by Ai Weiwei in his artist's room – "it is not the form of expression but the freedom provided by thought that is important" (this quote may be slightly off – I am going by memory). The Tate Modern has art that makes you think. I think it also put me into the perfect frame of mind to go and see *I3*.

I also went to Shakespeare's Globe, as it was right next to the museum. It was something that, as a Shakespeare fan in London, I simply had to do. Though it is not the original globe but a reconstruction, it was nonetheless an experience I would highly recommend. The exhibit that accompanies the reconstructed globe is worthwhile as well.

13

I am going to go to bat for this play. Though a number of my peers have tried to convince me that I am wrong, I think that this play was very, very interesting and tackled interesting and relevant issues in interesting and relevant ways. The reason I feel that this play was so controversial amongst our group was that it refused to cohere into a resolution or a message, and, thanks to Aristotle, that is what we expect from theater. Yes, *13* had a lot of storylines. Yet I think that this refusal to focus was, whether it was purposeful or not, an interesting reflection of our society.



The Hanging Cube at Pre-show 13

As a result of the way we acquire our information, interact socially, and spend our leisure time now, we as a western society (British and American alike) are losing the ability to focus on single tasks. We are accustomed to having ten different tabs open on our search engines, watching TV and texting our friends, all at the same time. In our own lives there are multiple storylines intersecting at every moment. Although I do not wish to go into the studies here, there is increasing evidence that this type of interaction changes the way our brains work. We are a society addicted to multitasking, and the more we do it, the more wired we are to have our attention divided a million different ways at once.

At the end of the first act, when all of the characters were interacting on stage, it was confusing. I missed some of the action. Multiple important events occurred at once; it was impossible to notice everything. Yet I feel this is similar to the way we take in information these days. I can do my homework while eating, watching television and talking to my housemates, and though I am able to accomplish all of these tasks, I probably miss some key words of what I am reading or what my friends are saying, I cannot pay my food the gustatory attention it deserves and the television is probably reduced to background noise. In dividing our attention so many ways, we can accomplish more, but we accomplish less of each of the parts of the whole. I saw the scattered nature of the play as a reflection of this. We cannot keep track of everything that is going on, true, but we only object to that because we expect plays to package up their revelations neatly into an easily processed package. This play refused to do so, giving us a glimpse into our own attention spans.

It is also true that some of the storylines of the play could have been more developed. For example, the Grandmother with dementia. She is a minor character with an interesting storyline –

she could have been a crucial allegory or some vessel of a grand message. Instead, she is just a minor character who accidentally happens upon a crucial plot point and has a partly developed backstory. In a play, this is a problem – however, that is likely what she would be in the real world narrative. We each treat ourselves as “the only girl in the world,” taking others at face value or listening to part of their back story, while still maintaining an all-encompassing self focus. Rarely do we take the time to learn the full backstories or to contemplate the allegorical importance of the minor characters of our lives. This play did not give us character studies, but it did show us the way that we might put characters into boxes in life – thus, the Grandmother becomes merely the Grandma with Dementia, a sadly familiar and clichéd figure.

It could also be argued that many of the characters in this play were clichés. You have the unkempt, resurrected young man as a political revolutionary/Jesus figure (though I think that the end of the play reveals that John was instead the figure of John the Baptist, trying vainly to fill Simon/Jesus’ shoes), the Iron Lady as a woman in politics (particularly familiar to a British audience), the obnoxious precocious little girl, the skeezy lawyer. Yet despite the clichés of the characters (stemming from the above-explicated refusal to unrealistically flesh-out back stories) and perhaps of the storylines, I think that these clichés fit with a sample of our society as well. As we distill complex issues and events into headlines, facebook statuses and tweets, we deconstruct these issues and events into clichés. We a culture of generalizations and simplifications.

This play does not neatly fit into any canon that I can think of. It has been deconstructed and re-conceptualized so that it fails to fit our expectations of what a play should do, and thus we reject it. Yet I think what it does accomplish, in the format of the play as much as in the content,

is hold up a mirror to the audience and ask if we are able to recognize ourselves. This play got me and my peers in the course talking about our society and current political (I use the term political loosely here) trends and issues in ways that we had not previously. An important aspect of the play lies in the interaction between the audience and the production. On the stage, it is unfinished; it exists most completely in our intellectual interaction with it.

I am now going to make a crazy prediction that I perhaps have no right to make: I could conceive of more literature and art like this, deconstructed until it is difficult to recognize, past the bounds of post-modernism. This play does not satisfactorily fit the current canon, but I think it takes an important form and could thus fit into what literary theorists years from now will classify as a new canon. If future productions reflect the same trends, this play or plays like it could be seen pioneers of a new period of cultural theory – post-postmodern, if you will. Conversely, it could also be an outlier, a deviant play that sticks out to future theater critics only as the model of a poorly constructed, schizophrenic play. I honestly feel that it could go either way, depending on the future literary, artistic and theatrical trends.

January 9th, 2012

Daily Events

This day I went back to the British Museum (seriously, a must-see) and then went shopping around Covent Garden, which has a bunch of great independent and chain stores. The only thing I bought was a rather fabulous hat for the purpose of having a hat to wear to tea!

The Pitmen Painters

Why couldn't Jimmy Floyd paint a blob and have it represent war? His wavy, red blob reminded me of an exploding bomb and almost represented a 1940's version of the Vorticist

reaction to WWI (as a side note, Jimmy's paintings seem to happen accidentally on similarities to other famous artists – his still life was remarkably similar in style to Raoul Dufy). Yet because the painters of the Ashington group were defined by their outsider status, they *couldn't* paint what the insiders painted. Though this play presented Ben Nicholson as a compromised figure, whose actions are dictated by and done for his patrons, in a way the Ashington painters were similarly bound by expectations. Ben Nicholson was expected to push the bounds of what was expected art by being inventive, the Ashington painters were supposed to push the bounds of art by being pitmen. In order to be accepted, however, they needed to do what was considered Pitmen Art. Though they were perhaps freed by their outsider status, they were also defined by it.

Oliver rejects some of what the professor says about their art, because in his laudatory introduction speech to the gallery show the professor reveals that he doesn't really see them as individuals. They are all the same – they produce collective Pitman Art. Jimmy is not a painter Oliver is not a painter, Harry is not a painter; the *pitmen* are painters. In saying that their success proves that anyone can paint, the Professor reduces the pitmen to a random sample of men that happened to pick up paintbrushes, rather than individuals with insight. I do think there is merit to what the Professor says – one message this play conveys is that no matter your background, everyone deserves a chance to have art in their lives and to use art to exhibit their point of view. Yet his generalizing is problematic as well.

Oliver immediately picks up on these problems. He wants to produce his own art. When he first seems to connect with painting, he seems to connect with being his own boss and creating something that is *his*. Yet in the end, all of the paintings by the Ashington group seem to be interchangeable. Thus, although he rejects Helen Sutherland's offer seemingly in a reaction to

Ben Nicholson's reservations, in a way he remains trapped underneath the influences of the group. He has no route to true artistic freedom – could he ever have it anyways? Is anyone ever truly their own master, bound as we all are to the rules, stated and unstated, of the societies we live in? He would always be artistically influenced by someone or something.

This play revealed the wonders of producing art, as well as some of the built-in fallacies of the art world. Once you define a creation as “art” and put it in a gallery, you impose expectations and judgements on it. In exposing your art, you let control of it go so that others can interpret it and decide whether it is worthy. Yet I also received the theme that art can be made solely for the self. The process of creation and of expression has worth, even in solitude. The concept of solitary art is comparable to the *Swan Lake* scene of Lee Hall's *Billy Elliot* – it is some of the most beautiful dancing in the musical, and Billy does it only for himself. I think that this is an important message: the most important and beautiful art can be that which is deeply personal. The best (in my opinion) painting that I have ever done has been seen only by my art teacher (who was there when I did it), because I did it for myself. I think Oliver understands this, as evidenced by his wonder at creating his *Deluge*. That is part of why he has an artist's soul. Yet though it seems like he understands art more than anyone else in the play, the world does not completely seem to understand his art. I kept rooting for him to win some great artistic recognition, but maybe I was rooting for the wrong thing. Maybe instead, his art was meant to stay personal.

January 10th, 2012

Daily Events

This day I went to the Victoria and Albert museum. I really wish I had had more time there, but as it was I, Caitlin and Sara spent nearly all of our time there in an exhibit titled “Theater and Performance”. We thought it appropriate. It was an absolutely fabulous exhibit, especially in the context of this course. It walked you through all of the aspects of a production – set, lighting, directing, costuming, marketing...and it was interactive. You could experiment with different sets for a Shakespeare production and play with a lighting board for a mini *Sweeney Todd* set. As my personal favorite, they had a closet of costumes meant to be tried on. We had a blast, and actually learned a fair amount. If there is anything slightly off the beaten track that I would recommend to future seminar participants, it would be a) the Victoria and Albert and b) The Theater Exhibit.

The day wasn't over though. Next we went to the Saatchi Gallery and had high afternoon tea, which was one of the things I absolutely wanted to make sure I did in London. It was delightful. The teapots were clear glass so you could see the herbs and spices, and we each got the requisite tiny sandwiches, scone with clotted cream and jam, and tiny little sweets.



High Afternoon Tea

Noises Off

I think that a comparison between farce and tragedy, as we did in class, is a very interesting way to think about this play. Farcical humor often depends on a series of unlikely coincidences. In *Nothing On*, the play-within-this-play, three sets of people (four, if you count the early arrival of the Arab who just happens to be the owner's doppelganger) who are not supposed to be in the house end up, by some twist of fate, in the house at the same time on the same day. The set of coincidences is so unlikely that it seems as if there must be some sort of upper, designing hand – like fate. The characters in a tragedy are also caught by fate, but their tragedy is presented to us at a speed at which we can relate to them and therefore feel the calamity of their demise. In a farce, we are not given the time to relate to the characters, and because the coincidences are so close together, it seems an unreasonable or absurd sequence of events. *Noises Off* was definitely absurd. It was also hilarious, and the hilarity stems in a large part from the absurdity.

With the idea that the sequence of events in *Noises Off* seemed almost improbable in the constant stacking of unfortunate coincidences, as if they needed to be arranged by some higher power in order to occur, the characterization of the director as God was particularly interesting. In the production of *Nothing On*, he almost is a God – he arranges the action and directs the events. His quoting of Genesis was funny and satiric, but it was also kind of appropriate. Yet in the next act when we move backstage, he becomes one of the pawns in the farcical chessboard. If he is a God, he's a very fallible one. Even in the first act his control was slipping – he could not get his motley crew of actors to do what he wanted them to. In the second act, he seems unable to regain authority however much he tries. He still attempts to control the events, but now he too is

caught on the unlucky side of fate. The events backstage and the way they build on each other to have worse and worse consequences for the characters are equally as improbable as the events in the original play, but now the designing mastermind is nowhere to be found.

Though cognitively I knew that I was always watching a play, it really did not seem like it. In the first act, the events on stage seemed like a play, but the director and the stage manager seemed real – I never, throughout the performance, actually thought of them as actors. In the second act, then, I felt as if I was actually watching the backstage. I lost sight of the fact that it was a play. Strangely, the actors-playing-actors were easier to identify as performers than the actors playing the tech crew and the director. Even when they took a bow at the end I still classified them as their characters in my head.

I thought it was very interesting the way this play built on itself. First, we are watching a farce. Then – wait – we are watching the rehearsal of a farce. The first act was humorous enough – had it been the whole play, I would not have felt something was out of place. Then, we go behind the scenes at a performance. The play has added a layer. Now, because we witnessed the first act, we are laughing both at what we are seeing in front of us (backstage) and what we imagine to be happening frontstage. We're laughing at two performances at once. Still, the performance in front of the curtains is mostly intact (from what we can tell), though we see the crazy rigamarole going on behind the scenes to keep it that way in the presence of the total upheaval. The rigamarole causes most of the humor.

Then, the play adds a final layer. Now we see a complete wreck of a performance. Yet while we watch this performance, we are mentally calculating what must be going on backstage (which we can imagine thanks to Act II) and to what the play originally was, which we know

thanks to Act I. We're laughing at three plays at once, and that is what makes the final act so funny. By itself, it is almost too deconstructed to be humorous. Stacked on top of and beside of the other acts, it's the absolutely side-splitting. It was like the entrance of the three burglars – one burglar is funny, two is funnier, and three – well, it's absurd.

January 11th, 2012

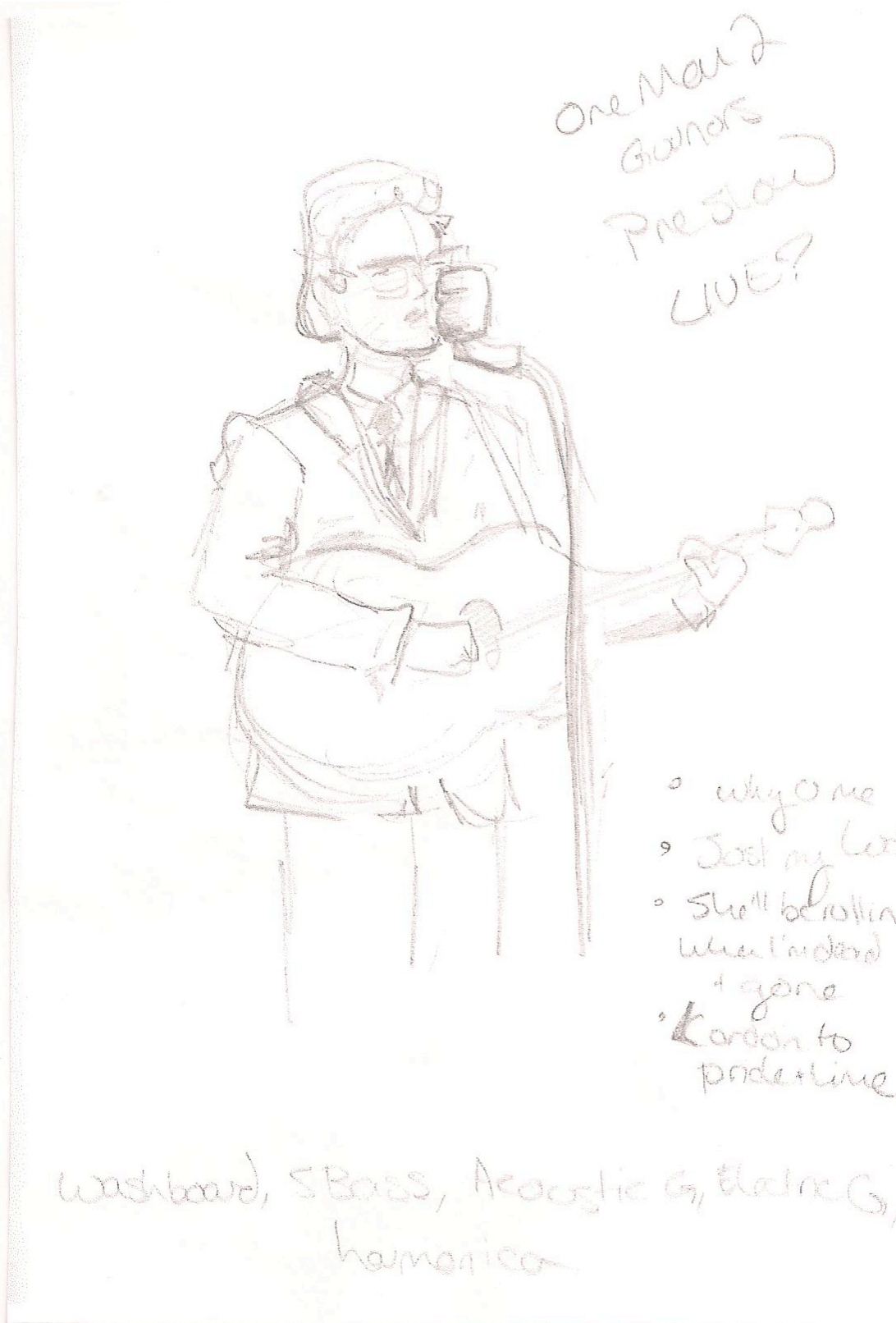
Daily Events

My main tourist event for the day was an expedition to Platform 9 3/4, which was frankly disappointing – it's just awkwardly stuck outside King's Cross Station. As a Harry Potter fan, however, I felt that it was something I had to do. Today was also the day we ate at Mon Plaisir, which was absolutely delicious, and thus far the only time in my life I have had to use proper fine dining etiquette!

One Man, Two Guvnors

I am very glad that we watched *One Man, Two Guvnors* and *Noises Off* consecutively. Although both are comedies, they represent very different types of comedy. *Noises Off* was a farce and derived most of its humor from situational irony and absurdity. *One Man, Two Guvnors* relies far more on slapstick comedy and satire.

This may be stereotypical, but this type of humor strikes me as very British – I think that they are more tolerant of mean humor (and sexual humor) than Americans. In other words, they are less sensitive. Some of the humor in this play was downright offensive, and some of that offensive humor was at the expense of an audience member (and some pseudo audience members definitely took some jabs). I am not saying that I did not find it funny – on the contrary, I found this play hilarious. The one gag I did not find amusing was when the woman (whom at



Lead singer of the Band of One Man, Two Gvnor's

the time we thought was an audience member) was set on fire, doused in water and then sprayed with a fire extinguisher. It reminded me of Malvolio's last entrance in *Twelfth Night* – the satire had gone too far, to the point of uncomfortableness. I am uncertain as to the real point of the scene in this particular play – rarely anyone in the audience laughed, and I am not sure we were meant to. Perhaps it is a reminder of some of the uglier sides of satire?

Back to the humor. It was mean humor, but a lot of it was self-directed by the characters, and all of it was hilarious. Yet it was kind of like watching someone fall down and giggling at it – humor at the expense of hardship. Alfie was hilarious, and yet we were laughing uproariously at an arthritic old man who is forced to work when he should have been being cared for. Francis' hunger was funny, but he was starving. It is interesting how we deal with these types of hardship. What does it say about us as a human race that we find humor in pain?

Integrating the band into this play was an interesting choice. I personally enjoyed it, because it was entertaining at moments during this play when I do not think I was necessarily going to be entertained otherwise. As the music began when normally we would just be staring at a curtain, in a way the band conditioned the audience to be in a certain mood. Before the play even began, we were ready to be entertained because a group of purple suit clad musicians were playing for us. After a while I did start to wonder when the band came on during the play what their purpose was – I suppose I could not really see an overt connection between them and the play and therefore started to get a bit bored of them (I also preferred the earlier bluegrass feel to the later rock feel, which may have been a contributing factor). However, that was right before they started integrating the characters of the play into the music. Given the extent to which they broke the fourth wall of this play, I thought it was interesting the way that the actors fully

embodied their caricature-like characters, even when they were outside of the normal context of the play. It was not like we were really watching a performance, but more like we were watching the antics of a rather absurd set of human beings. I suppose that this is exactly what we were doing, except that they were acting. Ironically, perhaps because of their open acknowledgment that this was a performance, I almost believed in it more. I am still disappointed that sandwich-guy was a plant – I truly believed that he was real.

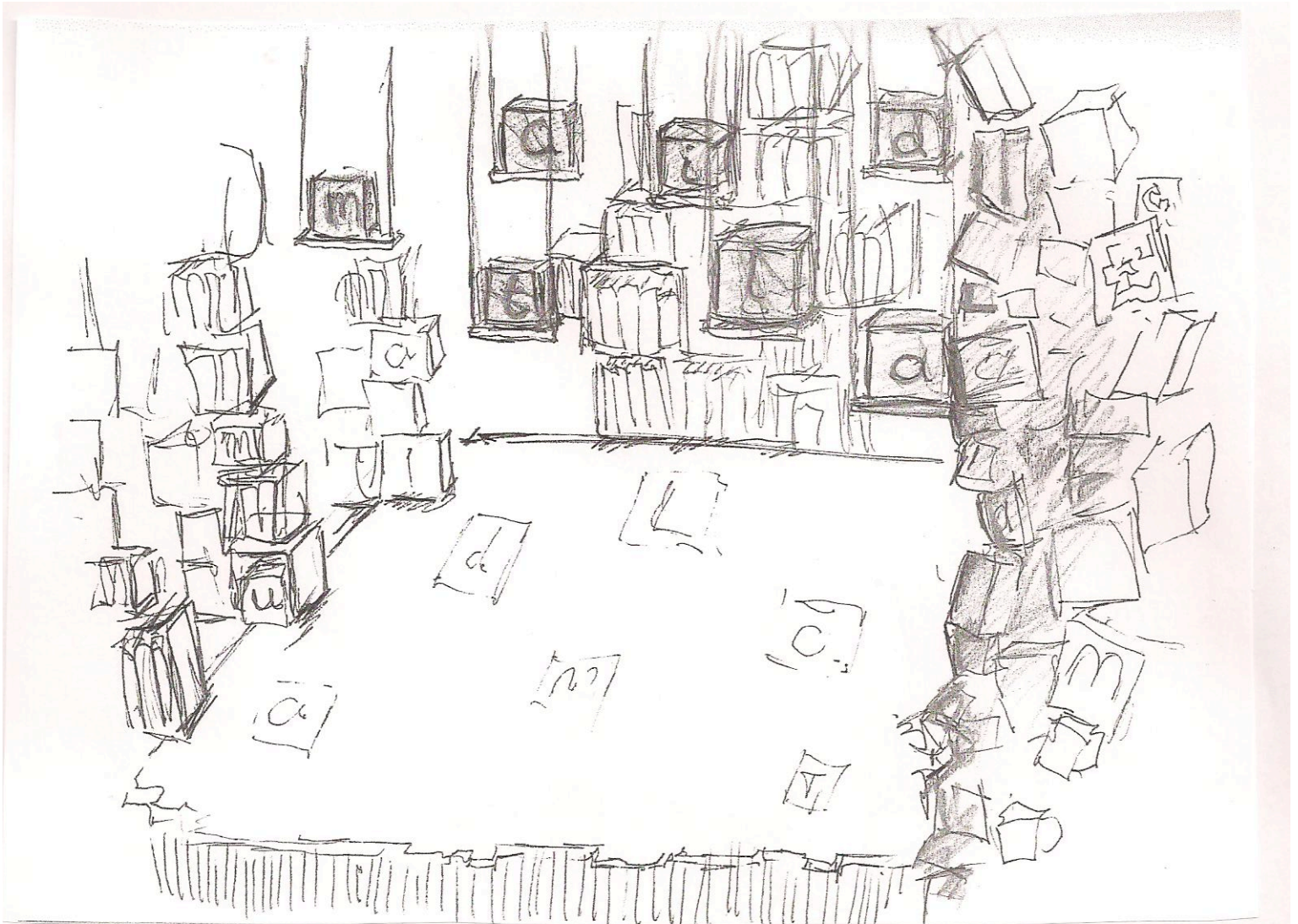
Matilda, the Musical

Having seen the movie of this story made it clear to me, again, how a story can twist and alter its message by simply changing the format of its telling. In the movie, the principle message seems to be the triumph of good (Matilda and Miss Honey) over evil (Miss Trunchbull). Yet in the play, I found the message to be more about the power of stories and of books.

Matilda is a story teller and an avid reader in this version. She is undoubtedly a genius, but there's a concerted focus on her love of words over factors such as her amazing mathematical skills. The truth and realism of her story about Miss Honey and her parentage is a more astonishing feat than her telekinesis, and her learning of Russian to read Dostoevsky saves her father's life. In the movie, her telekinesis is a huge focus and is ultimately what defeats Miss Trunchbull. While she still uses her telekinetic powers to scare away Miss Trunchbull in this musical, they are not really a focus. In a way, they are almost another aspect of her storytelling abilities – she can create a narrative so powerful that it creeps from that reality into our own.

Matilda's storytelling becomes her way of escaping her terrible home life. By bringing her stories to life, she is able to escape into a world where she is valued. It was akin to *War Horse*, where Major Nichols and Albert escape into their imaginations (indicated by the

drawings) in order to escape the horror of war. Imagination becomes a place of refuge, somewhere she is in control. In her stories, Matilda controls the sequence of events. In her life, although she does exhibit a measure of control by rebelling against her father when he demeans her, she rebels in reaction. He (and her mother and Miss Trunchbull) still hold most of the power. Her escape to her imagination is similar – “just because life not’s fair it doesn’t mean that you just have to grin and bear it”. Maybe she lacks the power to leave, but she does not need to remain invested in a hostile home.



Set of Matilda, the Musical

The set also emphasized the power of words. The bookshelves all along the back, the letters and words surrounding the stage, hanging from the ceiling and lit up on the floor, all brought attention to the power of language. Plus, it was really cool – the set to this play was beautiful. I loved the detail of the words, the scrabble-like letter blocks, the colors. Not only was the theme played out surrounding, as soon as you walked into the theater there were pastel colored chalkboards everywhere – and you could draw on them! The delight that the theatergoers evidently took in writing on the chalkboards indicates that we all have an inner child – another theme of the play. I loved that at the end of the “when I grow up” number, Miss Honey (ostensibly all grown up) comes out and sits on the swing, singing the same song. This musical celebrates the inner child and shows the power of make-believe. Make-believe can be a tool of rebellion: as Matilda says, sometimes accepting reality means acquiescing to the unfairness of your life: “Just because you find that life’s not fair doesn’t mean that you just have to grin and bear it.” She implies that if you fail to assert yourself you become complicit in the unfairness – “and that’s not right.” When I grow up, I want to be Matilda.

The children of this play also reminded me of the rebelling children of *The Animals and the Children took to the Streets* and of the teens in *Jerusalem*. In *Animals and Children*, the children are treated similarly to how Miss Trunchbull treats the children of her school – as rebellious factions that need to be tamped down, punished and controlled. In *Animals*, the children rule the streets at night, so that the people of the Bayou need to lock their doors. They steal Eavy Eaves’ head. They seem like they embody what Miss Trunchbull sees in the children of *Matilda*. Yet in the end, their rebellion is crushed, and the establishment wins. Though the play characterizes this as an improvement, the audience sees it as forced acceptance to and

therefore continuation of a flawed social system. In *Jerusalem*, likewise, the teens of the town appear to all go through a period of rebellion when they escape to the magic of Rooster and the forest, but eventually they reject him and return to the rules of “normal” society. They “grow up.” Matilda, by contrast, would say that they are accepting the ending that is “written for them.” In leaving their rebellion behind and rejoining a flawed, magic-less, myth-less, unequal society, they become complicit in these errors – saying they “think that it’s ok.” At the end of *Matilda*, the children re-appropriate Miss Trunchbull’s epithet of “revolting” and turn it into a verb, revolting against her tyranny. They do not accept the rules of society or authority – they don’t “grin and bear it.” Sometimes, being “naughty” is the best option.

January 12th, 2012

Daily Events

Today I went with a group out to Hampstead, where we visited Keats House (unfortunately closed this day, but we took a picture in front!) and had a picnic in a tree in Hamstead Heath. I’m a country girl at heart, so exploring the Heath, climbing in trees and around the woods was really, really fun after so many days of city. It was also an interesting contrast to American parks – it was a taste of the British countryside that we didn’t get a chance to explore. It’s another off-the-beaten-path expedition that I would highly recommend.

The Comedy of Errors

I found the choice of music in this play an interesting addition. The songs were all popular songs that we would be familiar with and which dealt with madness in some way, but they were performed in a different language (Italian, perhaps? I cannot say for certain). They were familiar, but also turned on their heads. This reflects the way that both Antipholus’ worlds

get turned on their heads on the day of this play – for the Antipholus of Ephesus, a world he feels that he knows suddenly turns on him, while Antipholus of Syracuse is treated uncommonly well for a stranger in the town. For both of them, the play chronicles a sort of madness. Their world, to them, must seem to have gone mad, while the world, in turn, thinks that *they* have gone mad. The music illustrated the effect very well in my opinion.

Like *Twelfth Night*, this play involved a bedding reference that I was not expecting. Adriana sleeps with Antipholus of Syracuse in the place of her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus. This act, compared with other aspects of the production, introduces a spate of relationship issues into the story. While the play alludes to issues between Adriana and Antipholus in that though he has been a different person for only a day, she cites a weeks worth of marital issues and he clearly frequents the Porcupine, this production capitalized and enhanced these issues. Though we, the audience, could clearly tell the Antipholuses apart because of their accents, Adriana cannot tell that this man is not her husband. She goes on a lengthy speech about how well she knows him, when clearly she does not at all – and then she sleeps with him for good measure.

Actually, I thought that the fact that you could readily tell the Antipholuses apart by their accents exacerbated some of the issues within the society. Maybe it is a reflection of our own – in our current, narcissistic, de-personalized and detached society, would we fail to notice if all of a sudden one of our close relationships started speaking with a different accent? I think it could definitely be a possibility. This production did seem to aim to imitate modernity, with the Adriana and Luciana's Lohan-Kardashian-popstar-esque costumes and mannerisms. The only thing missing was the tiny little dog peeking out of their huge purses. This would also fit with the club music blasting from the Porcupine and the modern music played by the mariachi band.

I also thought it interesting that at the end of this production, the pairs that exited were not the marital pairs, but the familial pairs. We do not see a reconciliation between Antipholus of Ephesus and Adriana, and though Antipholus of Syracuse alludes to his admiration of Luciana, she looks vaguely shocked. As far as a happy Shakespearean marriage at the end, I didn't really see a promising future in this production.

January 13th, 2012

Daily Events

Today I went to the Tate Britain, where my I discovered that I just really, really like the set up of the Tate museums. They do a wonderful job of framing the art in a way to create an interface between the art and the viewer. Related to this course, in the program to *War Horse* the set designer speaks about using Vorticism as an inspiration, and some of the paintings she specifically cites are housed in the Tate Britain, which was a wonderful tie-in to see. I also discovered that, though before coming to London I had not really heard of Turner (my oversight), I really love his work. The Tate Britain houses a huge collection of Turners, so I had a fantastic time, walking around and staring at them for long, long amounts of time.

Haunted Child

As with many of the other plays we have seen, this play deals with how to appropriately react to a society that fails to fulfill certain needs. In this case, Douglas feels a lack of guidance, of direction, of faith and spirituality. In many ways, he's reacting to some of the same deficits as in *Jerusalem* or *13*, where our societies' collective lack of mythology, of faith, leaves a sort of hole in the psyche. Although it is pretty easy to villainize the father, I think that dismissing what he says because he seems unhinged and because he has taken an extreme route to addressing

these deficits ignores some very important points. I do not personally agree with the way he went about fulfilling his own needs. Like the father in *Juno and the Paycock*, he selfishly gives in to his own madness, ignoring the needs of his wife and son. Yet in expecting Douglas to ignore his own desire for guidance and for something greater, Julie is also being selfish. As an adult and an engineer, he is *supposed* to be steady, to support the family, to be satisfied with his very normal, pre-prescribed life. That is not, however, what he wants. He is not fulfilled, and because he has seemingly done everything right, has seemingly followed all of the rules, he is lost as to where to go next. He seems particularly distressed with the loss of his father – he is “haunted” by his loss.

What I received from this play was a critique of the idea of an “ideal” family life. That is what Julie seems to want – she wants to raise her son according to the rules, wants to follow the blueprint. She and Douglas have different expectations of life. It is almost like Greg and Steph in *Reasons to be Pretty*, where Steph wants to end up married (because when you love someone, that is what you do, right?) and Greg does not even really think about it. Julie wants to be an ideal family unit, and more importantly to have an ideal family unit for her son. Douglas does not find what he needs in the ideal, so he goes out looking for another model and stumbles into the Cult.

Thomas seems to be the complicating factor. When Douglas asks Julie why she changed, why she stopped being open and spontaneous (rough paraphrase), she says “I became a mother”. Honestly, had he not been a father, I would not feel that Douglas’ choice was an abandonment. He would have been abandoning Julie, true, but that does not strike me as quite the same as abandoning Julie with Thomas.

It may seem as if I am harshly criticizing Julie's behavior, but that is not what I want to do at all. I think that as a character, she shows tremendous strength. Her behavior is what I would logically envision most women doing in her shoes. Her husband disappears, and she steps up and takes control of her family. She tries her hardest to regain control of the situation, both through logic and through using her sexuality to her advantage to try to bring her husband back to her. She tries to be the "adult" for both of them. I think it is too easy to sympathize with her because she is in a terrible situation and because she adheres to the rules for behavior that we all know we are supposed to follow. If we believe her to be right and him to be wrong, however, I think we ignore the complex issues that the play brings up with regard to normality and abnormality.

I think my issue is that I wished for the two characters to find a middle ground. He falls victim to a cult, but she is similarly a victim of the cult of normality – the difference is that her 'cult' is socially acceptable. Although she is normatively in the "right", Julie's extreme Apollonian world was incomplete, but Douglas' new world was too extreme in its own way to offer a viable solution. He wants someone to tell him what to do, but he gives way too blindly to the arbitrary rules of a destructive religious leader. Neither one seems very healthy, but Douglas returns to her in the end, suggesting that she has won the power war. Yet she did not want to win like that – she did not want him to come back as a child, but instead as a man. Instead, in the last scene, he is definitively in a subordinate role, clutching her knees as a supplicant. She, and her son, stroke his head like his parents. We are left wondering about the future of this family – she is clearly going to have to function as the glue holding it together in the future. I just wonder how exactly she is going to accomplish this – is she going to bend her vision of "ideal" any?

January 14th**Daily Events**

Today I went to Oxford Circus to see Selfridges, tied with Harrods as the most unnecessarily large department store. It was intimidating, but I had heard that, having previously been to Harrods, Selfridges was a necessary experience to have while in London. If I were to recommend it, I would definitely urge you to go on a weekday instead of a weekend as I did!

Crazy for You

This production was an interesting way to end the course. We began with *War Horse*, a show replete with British themes. We end with *Crazy for You*, a show about the American ideal of the Wild West. As a side note, the introduction of the British adventurers was particularly funny in this production – I think our group found it the funniest out of the entire theater. Something about the contrast between stereotyped America and stereotyped Britain just made us, as a group of Americans, laugh. I am not sure why, but I thought that was interesting.

Regardless, this production was as glittery as the *Cinderella* pantomime and contained magically moveable sets like *Billy Elliot* and *Matilda, the Musical*. It was interesting to end with such a stereotypical musical, with the large, spectacular musical numbers and elaborate score, in contrast with so many of the other plays we had seen. Yet it actually addressed similar themes to the rest of the course, and was a great note to end on. I am perversely glad we ended with a play that had a definitive happy ending.

The protagonist of this show is named Bobby Child. In looking back over the plays we have seen, one of the most dominant themes I have seen is a reflection on what it means to be a

child and to be an adult, and the benefits and issues of both. As adults, is it selfish of us to childishly give in to our own needs above those of our dependents, like John of *Dublin Carol*, Captain Jack of *Juno and the Paycock*, and Douglas of *Haunted Child*? If we “grow up” and adhere too rigidly to the rules of society, do we acquiesce to a flawed and unfulfilling set of rules and values, like the defeat at the end of *Animals and Children* or the town of *Jerusalem* bulldozing Rooster’s woods? If we choose the practical above our dreams, are we being mature or are we giving up? Imagine an ending to *Billy Elliot* where Billy becomes a miner, instead of chasing his dream of dancing. It is singularly depressing, yet it is also undeniably practical. Should we accept the ending that is “written for us”, or, like Matilda, should we attempt to take control over our own story?

In *Crazy for You*, Bobby Child has a pretty nice future laid out for him. He has a family fortune and a family occupation – all he needs to do is fall in line. Interestingly, his mother expects him to “grow up” by her definition by doing exactly as she wishes – obeying her as if he is still a child. She finds his dream of dancing naive and foolish – childish – yet in pursuing it he breaks away from maternal control, which is a marker of growing up.

Perhaps in remaining true to our imaginations, in refusing to give up our childish dreams, we are actually being mature. As a child who stays rigidly loyal to what she intuitively feels is right instead of the strange rules written by Miss Trunchbull and her parents, Matilda is the strongest character in *Matilda, a Musical*. She is at once the most and least grown up. In breaking away from his mother’s plan and dancing, in trying to save the theater out in the west instead of following her rules and condemning it, Bobby Child acts as a positive role model. In folding to lost love and maternal orders (before the triumphant end), he appears almost petulant – defeated.

His triumphant ending comes when he achieves his dream role and his dream girl. Is dreaming childish? Perhaps. But it is also *right*.

January 15th, 2012

Daily Events

Today, I left London, and one of the most transformative and informative classes and experiences of my college career. This class and course made me think, actively, about art and performance and message in a myriad of ways. This was an extremely valuable experience, and I am so grateful that it is one I had the privilege to experience. Thank you so much for making it possible.