The following is a composite of journal made up of entries written by students in the 2008-2009 session of the *Theater in London* Class. The names, school years, and majors of the authors follow each entry. In some cases multiple entries for a single play are provided so as to allow the reader to see how different students responded to the same performance.

mother in the guise of a mother (in relation to her natural daughters) makes her no less despicable; though she obviously favors them, she has ruined her daughters and raised them as thoughtless, selfish beings. It comes down to the nature versus nurture question. Sure, the step-sisters probably had a propensity for a mean streak in their inherent personalities, but it was their mother who nurtured and cultivated it. In Perrault, unlike Grimm, the ugly step-sisters are forgiven and even rewarded with palace rooms and court husbands by Cinderella.

Both of these endings seem very extreme, in my opinion, but at least Still makes some attempt to mitigate matters with her distribution of eye-gouging. Even though the step-sisters are creatures of habit molded by their mother's influence, they are adults in the end and have some responsibility for their actions. They each get one eye gouged out by Cinderella's birds. The step-mother, on the other hand, corrupted not only herself but her daughters by teaching them to abuse Cinderella. She gets both eyes gouged out (one for each corrupted child?) by birds.

The music by Terje Isungset was very unique. Initially I wasn't sure I liked it, but as the play progressed I found the music and mood to coalesce into a symbiotic partnership; neither would be as powerful or moving without the other. One interesting aspect of the music was Isungset's physical location on the stage. Save for the moments when he was on the stage floor among the actors playing an ice trumpet or mouth-harp, his "Norwegian orchestra" (Isungset's

and otherworldly; it is integral to the production in creating an atmosphere of ice, despair, passion, and hope to drive the play forward.

-Beverly Ferguson (Class of 2009 Eastman/English)

M. R. James, Two Ghost Stories: “Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” and “The Ash Tree.” Barons Court Theatre

This recitation of M.R. James' two ghost stories "Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You My Lad" and "The Ash Tree" introduced me to my first London pub theatre, the Baron's Court. It is located on the lower floor of the Curtain's Up Pub and is comprised of a few rows of tightly packed chairs in between (and behind) several pillars obscuring a tiny stage. As one reviewer put it, the theatre was "Intimate to the point where if you tried to read a paper you'd end up more or less violating the person next to you." Though the space obviously left much to be desired, it actually worked quite well in terms of atmosphere for the reading of the ghost stories, and the performer R.M. Lloyd Parry was phenomenally talented.

Parry sat in a cushy armchair surrounded by antique furniture, musty tomes, candelabras, and a decanter of brandy. The only lighting in the room came from the glow of the candles, which Parry strategically blew out at key points in his story-telling to darken the mood and increase the mystery. I really liked the dark setting because it made me forget the fact that I was in the cramped basement of a pub and allowed me to believe I was really sitting in this old scholar's study, listening to a ghost story.

Admittedly, the experience was not without its low points. At times during the first tale ("The Ash Tree"), the narrator's voice became monotonous to my ears which, coupled with the darkened room, briefly lulled me to sleep. It probably didn't help that the only thing I had for

dinner was a beer and chips. The tale itself was well-written, of course, but what made it less disturbing than the second story was that there was a logical (though supernatural) reason for the events that occurred: a witch had cursed the man who testified against her in a witch trial to a horrible death as well as generations of his family to come. Yes, it is strange and otherworldly, but at least there was some sort of understandable force of vengeance behind the acts. The next tale, however, offered no such answers and thus taps into every reasonable mind's fear of the unknown and the unknowable.

The second story, M. R. James' masterpiece "Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You My Lad," held me completely rapt. There was not a dull moment during the performance, from the beginning supper scene between Cambridge professors (during which the actor actually ate from a bowl of soup), to the shocking clatter of the bowl and tray at a key moment of horror during the tale, to the use of a handkerchief to describe the horrid face of the creature tormenting the main character: "...a horribly, an intensely horrible, face of crumpled linen." That may sound benign out of context, but the magic of the evening was Parry's (and, of course, James') ability to slowly fill us with anxiety by suppressing the manifestation of true horror until our nerves have been ever-so-subtly whittled down. The main character, Parkins, was a man devoted to his sense of reason; too devoted. He was rational to the point of deliberately forcing himself to disbelieve events that occurred before his very eyes if they did not align with his sense of logic. This was his failing; if he had acknowledged even the smallest sense of apprehension within him, he would have refrained from foolishly charging into what he did not understand (i.e. blowing the random whistle he found with archaic inscriptions and summoning the horrible ghost).

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Cinderella

obvious was the art of theater and performance. When the Fairy Godmother, played by Louise Dearman, appeared in the beginning of the play she promptly broke down the fourth wall by addressing the audience. Breaking the fourth wall and including the children in the stage action is widely used in children's theater in American as well. I think that this technique is a successful way to introduce children to theater because it eases them into the illusion that the action on stage is not real. It may be hard for children to understand the characters and the story is not reality and including them in the action of the play allows them to hold onto the fantasy of theater. Later in the play, the children were given a dose of reality when Buttons, played by American Ronn Lucas, admits to the children that he is a ventriloquist and this provides the voice and movement for his puppet characters. I was worried that this confession would destroy the fantasy for the children, but the fact that Buffalo Bill argued with Buttons about his voice bolstered it. The children were presented with the idea that what is happening on stage is not real through the fantasy itself.

Cinderella not only introduced children to theater, but to English culture. The first time that Cinderella, played by Joanna Page, speaks it is clear that her English accent sounds different than the accents of the other characters. We come to learn that she has decided to do a Welsh accent throughout the play, a fact which distresses her father Baron Hardup, played by famous impressionist Alastair McGowan, who must give his entrance spiel over again in a Welsh accent in order to match Cinderella's. While on the surface this is an opportunity written into the play in order to highlight Alastair McGowan's talents, it also introduces the idea to the children that there are people from different areas of Great Britain who may be different than them. This message is expanded with the discussion of Buttons' nationality—the children are introduced to Americans by the casting Ronn Lucas. Several of my colleagues have expressed their opinion

that *Cinderella* had a shallow plot, while that might by true for adults like us, from a child's innocent perspective it is plenty deep.

-Kristine Wadowsky (Class of 2009 English/Biological Sciences: Molecular Genetics)

Harold Pinter. *No Man's Land* (1975). Dir. Rupert Gould. Duke of York's Theatre

For me, the hardest part is knowing where to start a tale. The initial touch of pencil to paper or finger to keyboard is a terrifying one because you are committing yourself to what you put down and are forced to stand behind it, whether it is a success or failure. The same is true for relationships as well. That initial introduction, that mustering of enough courage to just say "hello" is hard enough, but continuing from there is even harder. Once you say hello, how do you move into a deeper understanding of the person to whom you are speaking? Can you even form an understanding of them? This appears to be where Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land* begins. From the initial words of Hirst offering Spooner a drink, to the final words (Hirst: "I'll drink to that"), No Mans Land is a play that leaves the audience with a slew of questions but no answers. From somewhat 'mundane' questions such as "what are the characters' relationships to one another", to more philosophical questions such as "can you really know someone", *No Man's Land* asks the audience to question the very fabric of its constructed reality. Even the seemingly mundane questions are not what they appear. Just by asking what are the characters' relationships, one is probing the idea of the truth. How do they really know each other? What is the true story behind these two characters? Then one must ask oneself, what is real and what is true. Although it seems like the plot from The Matrix, these are questions that failed to be answered on a daily basis. *No Man's Land* explores the reasons behind why these questions can never truly be answered.

The play begins with the concept that language is ineffectual, and thus unable to convey a person's intended meaning. Therefore, how does one convey that meaning? During the first act, Spooner begins explaining to Foster about how he almost painted a scene and entitled it "The Whistler", Spooner then asks if the title would confuse Foster as the subject matter would not be easily identifiable. To which Foster replies: "The name would baffle me, but I would appreciate the artwork. Did you hear that? I said I would appreciate the artwork". This line stood out to me because it clearly defines the difference between meaning and description. Also, the lack of action and different uses of inflections when speaking during the performance often lends a meaning to words that might not be intended. For example, the play on the word 'buns' when Spooner is describing his mother's baking skills. When Spooner mentions that his mother's buns were the best, did he mean, innocently, that her baking was good, or did he mean, as we all chuckled at, the incestuous notion that she indeed had fine buttocks? We use actions such as head and hand motions and facial expressions to help determine the intended meaning of what we hear. The actions coupled with inflections allow the listener to differentiate between words, in this case buns as in baked goods, and buns as in slang for buttocks. The lack of actions and the intentional misuse of inflections show just how unreliable current forms of communication may be. However, what this play does not do is illuminate a way to remedy this problem. That leads me to ask if there is a way to solve the 'communication dilemma'. One way I can think of is to create an individual and unique word for each and every item and emotion in the universe.

However, this would never happen in actuality. There are so many ideas and emotions that are inexpressible through the spoken word. Also, there are so many things that are considered taboo by society that the conversion of everyday words into slang usage will always develop to express these ideas. This leads to the idea of things being hidden as expressed in

Cinderella. The true intended meaning is hidden behind this mask of words, and it is the job of the listener to uncover the intentions, however, what is uncovered is not always accurate.

Another question to ask, though, is how much does one really want to uncover? In the case of Spooner and Hirst, it was uncovered that Hirst slept with Spooner's wife, ultimately leading to her leaving Spooner. In this case, Spooner uncovers the fact that he really does not know his 'friend' Hirst. This in turn begs the question: can you really know someone? What does one use to develop ideas and thoughts about people? Is it their relationship widi their family: they are good parents, kind siblings, caring children? Or their relationship with mutual acquaintances: Bobby's girlfriend, Alice's father, Hirst's friend? Do we use auxiliary relationships to promote relationships with others: I am John's friend and you are John's friend, therefore we must share something in common with John and possibly with each other?

Or as in the case of Spooner and Hirst (perhaps) do relationships rely on past histories and occurrences? However, how accurate are these past events once they are past? People often remember events more fondly when looking back on them, and even forget other events as time passes. This is contradictory to Hirst's statement of how memory "never changes, never grows old". Yet Hirst also states that his memories are more real than his present, thus asking once again what indeed is real? However, is it important what is actual, real, or even true? Do these things change from person to person and if so do they really matter at all? Is it absolute truth that people glean from conversation or is it the relative truth that is important?

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find the right words to convey the meaning they want when speaking. Many people argue over misunderstood phrases and words when the right meaning is not heard. What is it that makes this

The actors Michael Gambon (Hirst) and David Bradley (Spooner) were fantastic at maintaining the humor and moments of vivid realism inherent in Pinter's script while still assaulting us with metaphysical implications about the very nature of the self. The interplay between the two actors was perfect, in my opinion: Bradley's silly, smiling, meandering Spooner contrasted with Gambon's reticent, nearly senile Hirst who perpetually drowns himself in alcohol. Later the two complement each other perfectly yet again when Spooner stands silent (for once) with his glass of breakfast champagne and Hirst "actually skips across the stage like a dancing porpoise" (a description I'm fond of from one reviewer) and chats it up with Spooner as if he's an old friend from Oxford.

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This idea is reinforced by the huge ceiling-to-floor window on the side of the stage that is covered by blinds. Hirst goes to this window and peeps out at the "outside world," covering his eyes as if he is terrified of what he is about to see...as if what he will see will not support the idea of the world and the identity he has constructed for himself and will confirm his worst fears. He reels back as if struck when he sees outside the window and is reduced to crawling across the stage, desperately touching his furniture as if to assure himself that it is "real" or solid, until he

eventually crawls out the door on the other side of the stage. Later, when it is morning, the window comes into play again. The manservant Briggs opens the window to fill the room with light which, after the invariable darkness of the previous act, literally blinds the audience for a moment. This once again forces us to experience the essential components of the play's subject matter and contributes to the feeling that what is being enacted on stage applies directly to each of us on a very personal level. Hirst demands to cl

novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* emphasizes that point. The narrator, Paul Bäumer, having lost his sense of direction in no man's land, sits waiting in a trench. Time drags on indefinitely as he watches the Frenchman he has killed slowly die. The tortured screams of dying horses ringing across the battlefield give Paul a feeling of anguish he can never fully extinguish. In the madness of no man's land, there is no hope of finding time, space, language, reason, or anything meaningful.

Harold Pinter's aptly titled play *No Man's Land* follows the aimless conversations between Hirst, his houseguest Spooner, and his manservants Briggs and Foster over drinks. Their musings—ranging from the confused to the aggressive—inadvertently question the nature of time, language, and reality. Despite the title, allusions to the chaos of war are absent from the play. Instead it examines the implications of a life without climax in no man's land. The play has no clearly discernible plot and its dramatic structure looks more like a flat road than a pyramid. It also lacks a satisfying denouement; instead of concluding the play, Pinter makes it clear that the Hirst will continue his tedious life ad infinitum. After the subject changes—for the last time—the conversation becomes circular, with no clear end in sight, until Hirst makes a toast and swallows the whole drunken situation.

No Man's Land is a very disorienting play. It opens with a literal chord of dissonance, which inspires an unsettling feeling that is never fully resolved. This discomfort is only exacerbated by the play itself. Every time that the play begins to develop a promising storyline, it is abruptly cut off. At one point, Spooner starts to regale us with a tale about a long-forgotten encounter with royalty in a tavern, but he is interrupted and loses his train of thought. Later, Hirst enthusiastically appears to recognize Spooner as an old college rival, but this encounter again ultimately ends in confusion, with Hirst questioning Spooner's identity and presence. The play

repeatedly sounds a leading tone to build tension, but refuses to follow through with a satisfying resolution.

The sense of disorientation was only compounded by the enormous quantities of alcohol consumed. A massive, central bar, fully stocked with all varieties of liquor, dominates the set. Lights behind the bar cast the distorted shadows of the booze bottles over everything, indicating alcohol's pervasive presence. For stretches of the first act—and to comedic effect—Hirst silently poured himself glass after glass of alcohol. Hirst, at one point, even claims to have only hired Foster and Briggs because he needed people to pour his drinks. Meanwhile, Spooner is not shy. During the opening scene, in which Spooner dominates the conversation, he helps himself to his fair share of his host's liquor. At breakfast the next morning he experiences no shame in cracking open a fresh bottle of champagne so early in the day.

Both Spooner and Hirst claim to be poets, and Spooner even occasionally speaks in rhyme. However, at a loss for words, he is forced to fill in the end of his first rhyme with nonsense syllables, highlighting the futility of language. Even in an ideal situation, poetry—an attempt to trick words into attaining a meaning—is difficult to comprehend. Spooner notes that the only ones left who translate verse nowadays are the Romanians. But where does that leave those of us who don't speak Romanian?

Spooner dragged out his speeches with long pauses. By the time he had concluded a sentence, I had forgotten where he had started. Thus, even simple statements became convoluted messes and language began to lose its meaning. Rather than understanding what he said, I often focused on the individual words in his dialogue, until their very idea became ludicrous. Hirst certainly didn't understand Spooner's words. Michael Gambon played the role brilliantly: he

stared blankly into the audience, avoiding any eye contact with his guest. He refused to reply to Spooner's dialogue, giving no indication that he was even remotely interested.

The play distorts the sense of time. Following the interlude, the massive window in the sets background has its curtains drawn. With no view to the outside world, we are as in the dark to the time of day as Spooner who has only just woken up. When the curtains are opened, the window lets in a harsh light, illuminating the audience and revealing that it is morning. The sudden brightness made it painful to even squint at the stage. Being still jetlagged myself, I could sympathize fully with Spooner's disorientation. Hirst also plays with the idea of time. Having woken up sometime in the middle of the night, he takes a drink, noting it as the "first of the day." Had a new day begun simply because he has taken a nap?

No Man's Land demands analysis. The audience is expected to take an active role in

see its last run so that I could note the differences. From what I'm told it was even more elaborate then, but I don't see that there could be many ways to improve on what I saw.

The first striking element of the play was the set. The Olivier Theatre was a wonderful place to stage this, and not only because its rotating lift allowed for various interesting maneuvers. The ambiance of the theatre contributed to the feeling of the production. I immediately noticed a white projection screen that looked like a tear as the only real piece of set obviously present. I thought it interesting that we later learned that the screen was indeed supposed to look like a tear, hearkening back to the page Albert tore out of the officer's sketchbook.

The projections on this screen added a lot to the performance. They were often drawings

act. When the young puppet of Joey appeared, I knew he was a puppet but my brain said "horse". Each movement was incredibly precise. To show interest, I noticed the puppeteers not only making the horse breathe harder, but moving the head, perking the ears and lifting the tail. The body language was so detailed and accurate that I imagine a real horse might be confused by the puppet's presence! I enjoyed the puppet designers' choice to leave unjointed legs on the young version of Joey, because it lent a sense of instability to the gait that is definitely present in how very young horses move. It didn't bother me that the puppeteers were visible – their presence was pretty easily ignored; and I found myself lost in the movements of their work.

Another scene that enchanted me was one of the first moments of battle. All the horses lined up together made a hugely powerful picture. Six gigantic puppets with men astride all of them, standing and then galloping together, was a shock. I thought the officer's fall from Joey was extremely well done. It is another example of the unimportance of the presence of certain "helping hands" onstage. Like the puppeteers, the men who came to lift and turn the officer through the air and lay him on the floor for his death did not bother me. In this way I almost look at *War Horse* as a performance art piece. Instead of trying for complete realism, they focus more on giving the idea of the moment. The emphasis is not only on conveying what is occurring in the plot, but how any given second of that plot might have felt for the characters. The way the men moved the officer slowly through the air gave me a feeling of helplessness – something terrible was happening very slowly, and yet there was no way to help; only more time to think about the terrible event even as it occurred.

Perhaps in this way *War Horse* was more realistic than some of the other, more "normal" plays we have seen. Although others have more straightforward events, and might look more real on the surface, the fact that this play touched so deeply to the emotions is to me very

significant. The level of cathars

little – she sees her from beginning to end as a liability to be contained; an ungrateful problem that she ignores as much as possible. She never gives Suzette a straight answer about when she will be able to do anything for her; whether it be going out to dinner or paying for the hotel she wished her daughter to hide in for the preservation of her mother's political career. All of this translates into symptoms of the greater disease of their connection: Suzette gets no support or real love from the woman who should have been most relied upon to supply them.

I thought the actress that portrayed Suzette in this production was very successful in conveying the feelings of her character. Her body language was very expressive, and her tone

used to advantage as a way to get the speaker completely alone on set. Placing the other actors' exits just before the scene change left the speaker a solitary character. This was an impactive method because not only did it bring the audience's complete focus on the actor in question, but it gave a sense of unreality to the moment. The character seemed to be out of time; out of the play; speaking directly to the audience. It almost seemed as if the actors performing these parts of the play were breaking the fourth wall, though they never specifically acknowledged this.

Overall the movements of the actors seemed very well staged and helpful to the advancement of the plot and the mood of the play. One scene that stuck out in my mind was between Monique, Lori and the journalist. While discussing their situation over the bar, a clear power struggle is taking place. What is interesting is that the journalist, seated stage right, seems to be in control at first. When Lori takes charge, she moves around the bar from the stage left side to the place where the journalist has been sitting. Not only that, but she exchanges their drinks' positions. These movements were a clear symbol of the change in power positions between the characters at this point.

Gethsemane was a great production simply because of its social commentary and the overarching message it conveyed. What made it truly enjoyable was the creative methods it used in the conveyance. From a set of walls made into projection screens to the placement of monologues to simple good casting, I thoroughly enjoyed this production.

- Christine Rose (Class of 2011 Biology)

I had high hopes for *Gethsemane* written by David Hare and directed by Howard Davies from the minute the first words were spoken. This is probably because I was brought up in a nonreligious household and have always felt, as Lori Drysdale does, that I am a person “without

a book." Beyond the opening, I enjoyed all the ideas and issues presented in this play because I found most of them highly relatable. Excluding of course, the strong message related specifically to English politics, which I wasn't able to associate with my life experiences when I was watching the play because I was unfamiliar with the details. Once we talked about the Labour party and English politics in class, however, I was better able to understand the broader meaning. In fact, I found that while I was able to immediately relate to most of the ideas and issues presented in *Gethsemane*, it was not until I pondered them after the play that I was able to fully appreciate the depth of their significance. For instance, you would think that being the title of the play the idea of having a "night of doubt" or a Gethsemane would clearly apply to all the characters, but I only associated it with Lori Drysdale, played by Nicola Walker, when I was watching a play. This is because she is the only character in the play

him to reassess the situation. Just like Geoff, the rest of the characters, excluding Lori, have lead themselves blindly down their path without stopping to consider their doubt. They are miserable because they are unable to let go of their idealistic plans for their lives and accept reality. Meredith Grace, played by Tamsin Greig, portrays this phenomenon best with her line, "once it was possible to do good [in politics] by being good. / Now the only way to do good is by being clever." While Meredith does address her idealistic idea of politics with this line, it is clear by her constant struggle with having to be "clever" in her day to day interactions as a politician that she has not accepted the reality she has presented. In my opinion, this play is trying to make the point that in order to really accept your life as it is and be really committed to the path that it is taking you on, one must have a period a doubt which stops everything that one is doing in order to look at the situation with a new perspective; one must have a Gethsemane in order to be happy with the path which one is leading. What I find to be important is that the ending result is the same—whether one has a Gethsemane or not, one stays on the same path. The crucial difference however, it is only by having doubt that one is able to know it is the right path for them. I was sure that at the end of the play that Lori realized that music is the right medium through which to express herself, she continued on her original path. The other characters, such as Geoff and Meredith, also continue to follow the same path but do so without perspective and in unhappiness because they have not had a Gethsemane.

-Kristine Wadowsky (Class of 2009 English/Biological Sciences: Molecular Genetics)

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1601). Dir. Gregory Doran. Novello Theatre

Prior to seeing the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Hamlet*, I had read the play, but never seen it performed. Director Gregory Doran shaped the production to make it

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This idea is reinforced by the huge ceiling-to-floor window on the side of the stage that is covered by blinds. Hirst goes to this window and peeps out at the "outside world," covering his eyes as if he is terrified of what he is about to see...as if what he will see will not support the idea of the world and the identity he has constructed for himself and will confirm his worst fears. He reels back as if struck when he sees outside the window and is reduced to crawling across the stage, desperately touching his furniture as if to assure himself that it is "real" or solid, until he

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