

The following is a composite journal compiled from select journal entries written by students in the 2011-2012 session of Russell Peck's *Theatre in England* course. The names, year of graduation, and majors of the authors follow each entry. In some cases, multiple entries for a single play are provided to allow the reader



Along with maintaining the play's momentum, the smooth scene changes also squeezed in details from the book that would have otherwise been overlooked. In this manner, the natural scene changes gave the impression that the characters' lives never stop, continuing even between the snapshots we see.

The set itself was decorated simply with only the necessary furnishings — a table, a rug, some chairs — reflecting the hardship of the March family. Some comforts of home emerged, such as a small Christmas tree that the sisters decorated together while singing about the importance of family. Additionally, the upstairs nook was covered in blankets and quilts; a comfortable retreat for Jo's writing which also helped create a separate stage area. From this attic, characters were able to call down, unseen by the others. The mostly plain, plank-wall backdrop gave the set a quaint, log cabin appearance. Part of the wall was painted with a scene of grain being picked up and scattered by the wind, in reference to "Transcendental Wild Oats," the name Alcott gave for a collection of newspaper publications.

At the end of the night, after each sister had found her match, the musical closed with a classical comedic ending: multiple weddings. While the sisters danced with their husbands, Seamus smiled alone, looking unfortunately out of place. The production incongruously resolved this bizarre sequence as a spectral Beth walked on stage to comfort him before drifting on into the afterlife.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

**Death and the Maiden(1990)**  
**Written by Ariel Dorfman**  
**Dir. Peter McKintosh**  
**Harold Pinter Theatre**

Thursday, December 29

Overall, the set and lighting design of *Death and the Maiden* had a nice aesthetic feel. My favorite parts of the technical aspects of the production were the simultaneous lights and sound of a car pulling into and out of a driveway on multiple occasions during the performance. The sound was very realistic and the movement of the lights almost perfectly presented itself as what it would look like from the perspective of the audience if a car were in fact pulling out of or into a driveway of a house. The lighting design required a nice mix of shadows, placement, angles, and cues executed from one light to the next to make this all work out as well as it did.

When it comes to other aspects of the production, such as the acting, I cannot say that I was impressed. Throughout most of the show, I felt the acting was forced and not believable. The actors seemed to be exaggerating their feelings and emotions and they did not evoke any feeling or emotion within me because of how unconvincing their emotions were, especially anger, grief, and a sense of revenge, which when performed well, can invigorate me.

The themes addressed in *Death and the Maiden* were certainly strong. It was clear how the oppression of women in the Chilean setting affected Paulina. She wanted her voice to be heard, to make a statement about the oppression of women in the sense that the laws of the nation are interpreted by males and, therefore, the country is run by men. Paulina wanted the suspected rapist to confess to what he had done and repent, even if he was innocent. For me, this actually speaks to the criminal justice system, not only in other countries, but in our country as well. I have recently taken a class where we learned about false confessions and reasons why people submit them. Some may feel coerced into doing so, that there is no other way out, and even in extreme cases, which are called coerced-internalized false confessions, individuals are

actually convinced that they committed a crime which they did not actually commit. In the case of *Death and the Maiden*, however, the confession is more of something that the Doctor has to do, presumably to save his own life, as the woman threatens his life if he does not admit to what he did and repent. The fundamental question of whether or not he is innocent remains, and is important because we are also confronted with the fundamental question of how much the woman actually remembers about the rape and if specific details presented to us are what actually occurred, or if she is just delusional, due to the trauma of the event.

None of these questions are answered and the play does have a strong ending, which leaves us with another question of whether or not she killed the Doctor at the end. A scene toward the end concluded with her holding a gun to his head, but then it went into blackout, without any indication of a gunshot. I interpreted it as her killing him for two reasons. The first being the grimace or smirk in the final scene that she exhibited and the second being that the doctor appeared as kind of an apparition or ghost-like figure, one like that of a dead man. Again, this is just my interpretation, and the Doctor's apparition can be seen as a fragment of the woman's imagination instead, to indicate that she was slightly delusional and th

No matter what everyone says, I really like this production and the fact that it's closing early upsets me. During the performance, there were several occasions where I was close to tears. The acting of Paulina, played by Thandie Newton, brought me into a state of mind where I could feel her pain and understood her need for the truth. I have to agree with others in our group that at first her acting felt a little forced. But later on in the play, I think the intensity that she brought into the production was crucial to its success.

Throughout the play, Paulina repeatedly emphasized the fact that she was raped multiple times. Yet even at the end of the play we still do not know how many times this happened. The play is centered on Paulina trying to get a confession from the doctor who, she believed, had held her as prisoner, raped her repeatedly, and tortured her. However, the "rape" discussed was more than physical. It's the type of pain that men find difficult to understand, the oppression of women in the society, being sexually repressed, expectations placed upon them and, lastly, the inability of getting their voices heard.

This obstacle for Paulina was so high. It was not just about whether Dr. Miranda was responsible or not; it was about her sanity and whether her husband believed in her. Gerardo was the one caught in the middle of the situation. As part of the audience, I could feel his hesitation and his back-and-forth indecision between the two sides. Gerardo seems to be a good character out front; however, he did not remember any details about the incidents that impacted his wife the most. Gerardo's ambivalence was just another pain that Paulina had to deal with. I thought that the fact that Gerardo does not believe in Paulina was the saddest part of this play. Paulina's sanity and the truth would always be an unknown, but Gerardo chose not to believe in his wife.

The idea that the damage of rape is irreparable was emphasized repeatedly in the play; the pain can be seen as from so many different aspects. I think this play would be a perfect fit for

an advocate of women rights or violence against women. I was very touched by the production and I believe others would be too.

Regarding the set, their use of lights coming into the house as though it was coming from real car driving by was a brilliant way to instill a horror and intense atmosphere on stage. I really liked the set design of the two bedrooms on each side of the stage. Whenever there was action within the room, we could always see the action through the shadow projected onto the “wall” and this was a great artistic choice. The set overall was pretty impressive with the high ceiling and elegant interior designs demonstrating the wealth of the couple.

– Li-Ya Sun (Class of 2012; Psychology)

As the first play I saw on this London trip, *Death & the Maiden* brought to light concepts that would remain on my mind during each subsequent production. For example, *Jerusalem* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* brought back memories of *Death & the Maiden* not just because their titles, but because of the way doubt edged its way into the minds of the audience throughout each drama. In *Death & the Maiden*, the most obvious doubt is whether or not the doctor, Roberto Miranda, is the man who had raped Paulina fifteen years ago. In *Jerusalem*, this doubt applies to whether the Byron boys of the past exist in the present and will physically come to John “Rooster” Byron’s rescue. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the doubt concerns whether or not Pozdnyshchev was correct in his assumption that his wife had been unfaithful, and whether she had been emotionally - if at least not physically - unfaithful to him through the music she played with Trukhachevski.

*Death & the Maiden* also brought to mind the concept of irreversibility. Paulina tells her husband that she can “[f]orgive, yes. Forget, no.” One should consider this quote a reference to the work’s title - Paulina’s rape had brought about her (metaphorical) death fifteen years ago,

causing an irreversible change in her life. However, the play suggests that the idea of avenging the past can be seen as healing by the victim. For example, Paulina regains her voice as the play progresses, standing up to her past, confronting her perceived tormentor, and challenging the authority of her husband.

While many of our plays dealt with gender issues, *Death & the Maiden* did so in an obvious fashion. Even the names of the three characters betray a focus on gender. “Paulina” is the female version of the masculine name “Paul,” and the “-ina” can be considered by some to be a diminution of the name to transform it to the feminine. Gerardo and Roberto are both masculine names. Neither of them has a unisex name (such as Quinn or Jordan, for instance) that could possibly be construed as female. Furthermore, the dynamics between Paulina and her husband (with regard to household chores or guests, for example) portray domestic boundary issues. Paulina cannot accept Gerardo’s wishes concerning Roberto’s safety, and Gerardo will not contend with Paulina’s reaction to Roberto’s presence. Audiences are left wondering which of the two - Paulina or Gerardo - has the crazy or the valid perception of reality.

*Death & the Maiden* also brings into question the effectiveness of the law. The ethics surrounding Paulina’s intent to seek justice outside the law are relevant whether or not audiences personally believe Roberto Miranda is the man guilty of raping Paulina in the past.

As a side note, *Death & the Maiden*, *The Kreutzer Sonata* (Tolstoy), and *A Doll’s House* (Henrik Ibsen) all involve the playing of a tarantella. Traditionally, the tarantella is a dance in 6/8 time performed by those bitten by a tarantula; the victim would dance in an uncontrollably wild manner in order to avoid death. To me, this signifies a loss of control with the hope of surviving. In *A Doll’s House* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the tarantella is played at the moment





audience and thought, "Is this normal?", but people seemed to enjoy the show by shouting and laughing at the ridiculousness.

Even though I was shocked at first, I enjoyed the pantomime overall because the humor was witty and up-to-date. For example, many of the musical scores were remakes of popular songs by Rihanna, LMFAO, and other recording artists. Moreover, people of any age were able to enjoy the show. For instance, children sang along with the fairy godmother and tossed around huge balloons. At one point, the stepmother bribed the audience by giving away tiaras to the children. Apparently, pantomimes are popular during the winter holidays in the UK because parents often take their children to go see them (almost exclusively at Christmas). I would love to see other pantomimes in the near future. I especially liked the dynamic interactions between the actors and the audience. It was something I have never seen before. I'm used to watching plays in silence, especially since even the smallest noises can distract the actors.

I was most surprised by the casting of different ethnicities in the play. I imagined Cinderella to have an all-white cast but Cinderella and the Prince were black, Cinderella's father was Indian and the Prince's best friend was Asian. One of the stepsisters was black while the other was white and the stepmother was white as well. I've had casting experience when I was at film school in New York City, and one of the biggest considerations for casting was the actor's ethnicity. I feel like for this particular production, the casting was race-blind. Or perhaps the multi-ethnic casting was an intentional strategy to get more audiences (and indeed, I later discovered from Professor Peck that the East Stratford area has a prominent Jamaican population, which has become a factor in its plays). I'm looking forward to seeing more plays and how the casting is done.

– Jungyeon “Deb” Youn (Class of 2012; International Relations and English)

Perhaps the most memorable aspect of this well-spun fairy tale was that it is *not* like any other play I've seen. In itself, it is classified under the category of pantomime – a musical comedy. The high degree of song and dance, in addition to the copious amounts of cross-dressing and audience participation, made it quite unique, and a cursory glance at its wiki explains a lot of the little details that confused me initially.

Some things I've noticed is that the characters frequently break the fourth wall, and make *numerous* references to pop culture (that I, unfortunately, being ignorant of most contemporary things), which were very positively received by the audience. *Cinderella* itself is a story that





puppeteer performed the horse's slow death. Handspring talked about how puppets have to struggle to be alive onstage, and it was as if these puppets were so lifelike that they then had to struggle to die realistically. During the performance, I was surprised that puppets could hold riders. I'm amazed at the physical demands on the puppeteers. The puppeteers working the colt had to bend over at the waist and I could only imagine how much that would hurt your back, and the other puppeteers left the stage sweat soaked. Despite all of the amazing puppetry, the tank disappointed me.

I often wonder what it's like to be in a production. For this play, I imagined that I would have a very sore back had I been one of the puppeteers of the colt or that the rotating stage would have disoriented me. I'm also often fascinated with the ensembles because I think they are the lynch pin for a truly engrossing and realistic production. *War Horse's* ensemble had wonderful physicality and attention to detail, especially. I loved how when they were holding up the beams of the corral they also appeared to be leaning on them and how one of the women in the town was holding her stomach, like she was pregnant. I thought those details added more life to the townspeople and tragedy to all of the men going off to the war than what was wrapped up in the main characters. Something that always strikes me, because I don't really feel like I've figured it out, was that the ensemble would talk to each other when they weren't scripted. Those soft conversational noises really added to the realism. As a vocal student, I spend much of my time trying to learn other languages and perform in them with accurate diction so I was impressed by how many languages were in the show. I can't imagine performing in a production trilingually.

I was awestruck by how detailed the production was. I found myself thinking, do they have multiple sketchbooks? Does that one detached page get reattached somehow? Were the projections above the stage taken from the sketchbook? What was the production process like if

that was the case? From where I was sitting, right next to Captain Nichols, the artistic cavalry officer, the sketches in his book mirrored the ones above the stage exactly. I liked how the projections above the stage showed time passing, the characters' location, and where the characters' minds were. The scenes above seemed better to reflect the skyline of home rather

unfolded over the course of World War I. In class, we discussed the “Dionysian madness” of what the war really was, compared to what the English anticipated it to be at its onset. As the English mounted their horses and prepared the cavalry, the opposing side was manning machine guns, bringing the war to a technologically unprecedented level. This startling contrast between the use of horses and the use of guns showed the progression of the technology of war and can be interpreted as a warning against civilization destroying itself through technology.

Instead of technology, the virtues of a simple, rustic life were extolled. The relationship between Albert and his horse, Joey, is true and pure, and we instantly see they were meant for each other. Many other characters show a similar kinship with horses, particularly with Joey. Although these characters came from different countries and spoke different languages, they shared this love of horses and could connect through that universal “language.”

Music is also often considered a kind of universal language and functioned much in this way in *War Horse*. The single male balladeer led many of the songs, adding depth and intimacy to the accompanying scenes. When more singers joined the balladeer, the sound was distinctly deep and resonant, consisting mostly of male voices. I found this very appropriate since





**PUPPETS:** *War Horse* is a show well known for its use of puppetry. After seeing it, it is quite clear why; the mechanical structure of those puppets are absolutely spectacular. At first glance, they appear to be made of a light, bamboo-like material. The thin mesh-like fabric wrapping around the skeleton adds to the fragile appearance of the horses and also serves to visually solidify them from wireframe to a frail but lifelike appearance. This delicate-looking frame made the first time that Albert, the main human character of the play, jumps on the Joey, the main horse puppet, even more spectacular, as we do not expect the horses to be able to hold the weight of a human. I would love to get a closer look at the mechanics behind them. From a distance, you can see that the front two legs have levers which serve as connections to bend the front two hooves and the back two legs have levers that swish the tail back and forth. The pole controlling the head seems to have levers to control ear movement and is connected to the top of the head by a swivel allowing easy and natural movement of the entire head and neck.

One of the most surprising things about the puppets is how invisible the operators become. They are dressed in costume like the rest of the cast, but in action seem barely noticeable under the massive frames of the horses. When adult Joey first appears, the natural movements and sheer size of the puppet itself hides the puppeteers. When I first heard the concept of the horses and after working with a small puppet during the U of R's interpretation of Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, I expected that the operators would be distracting and in the way. Their clever costuming and skillful operation in *War Horse*, however, made it so that the audience scarcely notices that they are there.

Besides horses, there were also a few other animal puppets from flying birds to geese, and I have to say that the goose puppet was a brilliant comedic aspect for the play. Though simple, with legs painted onto a spinning wheel and haphazard feathers glued on what appeared

to be a wooden frame, the goose was more realistic than some of the human characters and even had more per

The sound design for the show was spectacular. They had speakers not only in front facing the audience, but also above, behind, and to the sides. There were even some subwoofers under the stage and possibly even in the audience, judging from the feeling of the seats subtly shaking when heavy bass was played. The quality of the microphones used on the actors was top-of-the-line. There were times when their voices were being amplified to the point to where an audience member could not even tell microphones were being used. Normally, mics distort the voice slightly and you can hear certain frequencies more than normal, making the voice



world. It creates the impression that you have left behind the theatre where you came to see a play, and have arrived at an entirely new location where you are simply watching events unfold.

This was an extremely effective technique in creating an immersive feel to the play.

The attempt to make *Hamlet* not feel like a play was continued by the set. Once we finally reached our seats, the space in which we found ourselves did not in any way resemble a theatre. Instead, it seemed like some sort of dilapidated old auditorium in an aging public institution. Everything, from the way the seats were set up to the piles of junk by the upper

levels of the building, made it feel like we were in a real, old auditorium. The set design was a perfect example of how to create a realistic and immersive environment for the audience.

later find Benedict Wong, the actor who played Laertes at the bar, so I consider the mission to have been a partial success.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

After *Cinderella* and *War Horse*, I thought to myself: “All right. It’s *Hamlet*. I know *Hamlet*. Even my friends who are completely disinterested in the arts read *Hamlet* in high school.”

Boy, was I completely wrong. I’m not even sure where to begin with this particular journal. Yes, it’s *Hamlet*, but no, it wasn’t familiar at all. In hindsight, this particular production (as another curious aside, I seem to be picking up more and more theatre terminology as the days go by. Not enough to be fluent, but it definitely felt as if I understood more and more) was brilliant because of its unique twist. I asked around the class afterwards, and all agreed on one thing: this was the first *Hamlet* set in an insane asylum of some sort.

To begin, the “pre-show” journey wasn’t a journey at all, but rather, it was a part of the set. That in itself is brilliant because it draws the audience in and allows the audience to connect with the setting – an important element of story telling – before the play even begins. The hallway had this really beaten-up feel to it. It felt as if we were entering an old gymnasium or hospital. At first, I thought it was just a backstage tour. Jay even commented that they had real pieces of ham out for the actors (apparently they tasted good). I don’t think any of us suspected anything – I mean, there were real people playing handball in the gym! One of them even looked at me, made eye contact, and gave me a stern nod. How could it be anything else other than the “real” backstage?

An interesting thing I’ve noticed, however, is that the hallway's paint becomes more discolored and faded as we approach where we’re supposed to be. There is an overall feel of

decay – you may have noticed, Professor, that parts of the paint towards the end (chapel and infirmary) started to fade, and only when we approached the “security” checkpoint was there a fresh layer of white paint applied. That’s really where I figured out something else must be up. Suspicious, I knocked on the set, and the illusion immediately broke. It wasn’t a real wall – it was far too hollow to be a real wall. And then things clicked for me. The way in which we were ferried out of the theatre and taken all the way to the backside; the “journey”; the theatre itself with faded paint and mildew and half-broken basketball hoops, which again, reminded me of an old gym. This was all a part of their plan.

And then the PA announcement called. The red buzzer ar2(hdp)-12(c)4(h )]TJ -0



to be especially interesting, because it brings in an additional connection (that of man and woman, and all the awkward tensions that may possibly bring) that made the relationship richer. Unlike many members of the class, I secretly enjoyed Horatio's acting even though she sounded really hoarse. I never figured out what she was supposed to be in the play, but seeing the conflicted Hamlet confide in *someone* felt appropriate, especially because I was basically confused for the whole time.

What's going on? Why was Hamlet's father also played by Hamlet? What does it mean? Does this mean Hamlet basically imagined the whole thing? Why was Fortinbras also played by the same actor? What exactly was going on at the end, with Ophelia and Polonius "crawling" out from the grave? These are but some of the issues we touched on in class, and to keep this journal at a reasonable length I'll be glossing over the questions I've raised above (it seems hardly responsible of me if I just ask a question without trying to give an answer, isn't it?)

For starters, litar ct?)



philosophical and rather smart, even though no one tends to agree with them. Moreover, they both have hallucinations about talking to the dead. I couldn't help but notice how sweaty Hamlet was in the play and in the film version of *Shutter Island*, Leonardo DiCaprio who played Ted was always sweaty and nervous as well. Dr. Cawley and Claudius have obvious parallels because they are both psychiatrists and control the entire psychiatric facility.

I think any other Shakespearean tragedy can take place in a psychiatric institute and the production will be insane but extraordinary at the same time. For example, I think *Richard II* could take place in a hospital instead of a holy setting and the story would make perfect sense. Richard II would be a mad patient under the illusion that he is the king and at the end, would finally come to his senses and face a tragic death.

The setting of Rickson's play was relatively bare, but the props that the director used were brilliant. For example, using pills instead of flowers for Ophelia was disturbing, but it depicted how seriously traumatized she was after her father's death. Also, the pre-show journey into the Young Vic theater symbolized a journey into madness. Lastly, the coffin of Hamlet's father in the beginning of the play foreshadowed the fate of Hamlet and his family.

– Jungyeon “Deb” Youn (Class of 2012; International Relations and English)

Dublin Carol (2000)  
**Written by Conor McPherson**  
**Dir. Abbey Wright**  
**Trafalgar Studios 2**

Saturday, December 31

After our first day of play-going, on which we saw *War Horse* and *Hamlet*, *Dublin Carol* provided a nice change of pace. The two shows on the first day both featured large casts and impressive technical feats. It was refreshing, therefore, to see a show which was so small,



the future. In writing *Dublin Carol*, McPherson chose to change the order from the way it appeared in Dickens' original story, placing the present before the past. This choice worked well for the play because by delaying the revelation of John's tragic past until we have had time to come to terms with the reality of his present situation; it makes the stories we hear about his past much more powerful.

The final scene, which deals with the possibility of hope for John's future, was the most emotionally affecting to me. For this scene, Mary has departed and John speaks again to Mark. I felt that, after all I had learned about John's past in scene two, I looked on him with different eyes in the final scene. Despite all his flaws, I still found myself wishing that he could find happiness. I thought that the final moment, in which John begins to put up the Christmas decorations which he had taken down only a few minutes before, was a truly beautiful ending. Any real happy ending would have seemed terribly out of place in this play and ruined what I viewed as the honesty of the piece. Instead, this ending contained just enough of a hint that perhaps John could change his ways to be uplifting without breaking the realism of the rest of the play.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

**The Ladykillers(2011)**  
**Adapted by Graham Lineham from the play by William Rose**  
**Dir. Sean Foley**  
**Gielgud Theatre**

Based on the 1955 British film *The Ladykillers* (1955) by Alexander Mackendrick, adapted from the play *The Ladykillers* by William Rose, directed by Sean Foley at the Gielgud Theatre.

*Looney Tunes* shows. The image was well complemented by the cliché mystery-movie music, which reminded me of the *Pink Panther* series. When the curtain opened, it revealed a fanciful house with sloping architecture that intersected at impossible angles. When the nearby train passes and shakes the house, objects rattled around with unphysical movement and travelled in bizarre circular patterns. Together, these choices set the play in a fanciful world, where the audience needn't worry about consequences or plot holes.

This context was important, as the plot itself relies on many cartoonishly absurd yet

The story as whole wraps up neatly, and, like an episode of *Scooby Doo*, nothing really changes. The play ends exactly as it began, as Mrs. Wilberforce discusses her story with a skeptical policeman, and the main characters are set up again for the next episodic installment. The audience is left wondering: what other zany adventures are in store for Mrs. Wilberforce?

**Eucharist Mass**  
**Westminster Abbey**

Sunday, January 1, 2012

Starting the year of 2012, as a group, we went to Westminster Abbey for the New Year Mass. As a non-religious person, this was my first time to go into any service by the church and it was a very interesting experience. The inside of Westminster Abbey was mind-blowing. The amount of deta



apart.

When Juno's family learns of the inheritance left to Jack, they are overjoyed at the prospect of escaping that life of poverty. Jack outfits himself in a ship captain's garb, whereas before he preferred to lounge about the house or the bar in his comfortable moleskin trousers. Since Jack has never really been a captain, but likes to refer to himself as one, this wardrobe change can be taken to be a transformation in Jack from leisure to fantasy facilitated by the

characteristic of the Juno in the play. This is most evident in her loyalty to her daughter, even after they find out that Mary is pregnant out of wedlock. Jack and the family's son, Johnny, both reject Mary when they find out about the pregnancy, but Juno remains by her daughter's side and the two of them eventually find the strength to let go of Jack and his bad habits and set off on their own following Johnny's death.

In class, we talked about how this play is one of comic mockery, with the beginning containing funny, entertaining parts and the end spiraling into tragedy. I found the term “comic mockery” to be an excellent description of Jack's character because although we are laughing as Jack preens and prances around stage, the things we are laughing about are actually due to Jack's flaws and hypocrisy. In the end, we are no longer laughing, however, as Jack sits propped up on the floor of his home, utterly alone after having driven his family away from him and drinking himself into oblivion.

– Nika Tamashiro (Class of 2012; Japanese and Brain & Cognitive Science)

**Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (1864)**

**Written by Richard Wagner**

**Dir. Graham Vick**

**Covent Garden Royal House**

*Die Meistersinger* is interesting in that it is the only “unclassifiable” Wagner opera. Wagner himself re-categorized his opera many times during the twenty some years it took him to write it. Writing the opera over such a long period also allowed other operas that he wrote during this time to color *Die Meistersinger*. One could say that he corrected the mistakes of his other operas, *Tanhäuser* and *Tristan und Isolde*, in *Die Meistersinger*. Unlike King Mark in *Tristan und Isolde*, Hans Sachs gives up on his pursuit of Eva in favor of the younger suitor. Both *Tanhäuser* and

*Die Meistersinger* have a singing competition for the hand of the ingénue, but unlike in *Tanhäuser*, the singing competition at the end of *Die Meistersinger* ends in rejoicing, not turmoil.

If I were to classify *Die Meistersinger*, I would say it's a historical comedy. Wagner mentions historical figures and even bases the central figure on a historical figure. In fact, Wagner extensively researched the very guild and musical tradition that the entire opera is centered on. "Die Meistersinger" in German can be not only singular, "The Mastersinger," but plural referring to the guild and the tradition of the Meistersingers. Wagner conceived of the idea for the opera after reading a history of German literature and taking a special interest in the tradition of the Meistersinger and the marker figure that would mark how many mistakes a singer made in their performance. Wagner's research of the historical small community, the tradition of Meistersong, reworking Luther chorals into the opera

doors that opened up in the ceiling, from which acrobats hung during the second act's finale!

You didn't just see these brightly colored solid walls either; they rolled out on stage to reveal the interior of these houses. I thought that having the multifunctional minimalism was brilliant because it was very versatile; it was easy to imagine that you were in a different place with every new scene. Another part of the set that I loved and that added to the feeling of being out in the town square was a giant dollhouse recreation of various town buildings, like the chapel. Children brought the dollhouses out at the beginning of the opera and again at the end of the second act when we see the night watchmen patrolling the town. I think the best scene change was between the scene in Hans Sachs house to the scene in the park next to the river. The walls of his house rolled away, leaving a long bench of shoes (Hans Sachs was a cobbler) and you wondered, 'How are they going to get these off stage?' Then, the entire ensemble of the town came out in stockinged feet, put on their shoes, and finished the scene change! What I didn't know was that this was a revival and I don't know how much of production has to do with the director. So I'm



from all of the other characters, almost because of their reverence for him. Wagner is always brilliant at crafting music to tell the audience what the characters are thinking or feeling, and in this opera, it seems that that function of the music especially focuses on Sachs.

– Katie Lewis (Class of 2012; Music)

**Pippin (1972)**

**Music and Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz; Book by Roger O. Hirson**

**Dir. Mitch Sebastian**

**Menier Chocolate Factory Theatre**

As far as I understand it (see *Broadway Musicals: The 101 Greatest Shows of All Time*, written by Ken Bloom and Frank Vlastnik), *Pippin* and *Cats* occupy a particularly bizarre place in the Broadway canon as shows that are incredibly popular with fans and entirely unpopular with theatre scholars who write them off as shallow creations. *Cats* has endured the test of time, but *Pippin* has largely fallen off the map of professional musical theatre.

This tainted past makes the Menier Chocolate Factory's new adaptation of the show, conceived, directed, and choreographed by Mitch Sebastian, so exciting. As soon as we saw the set (with pseudo-laser lights tracing out doorways and windows, and Pippin himself, played by Harry Hepple, sitting at a computer positioned outside the theatre), I worried aloud that the music would feel too dated for a technology-

Dance is high-priority in Sebastian's work—not in the quantity of dance but in the way it colors the production. The aforementioned number about war featured an extensive fight sequence that included dance; Catherine (Carly Bawden) performs “Kind of Woman” in pointe shoes. This emphasis on choreography is one way Sebastian honors the original production; he studied under Bob Fosse, who choreographed the original production of *Pippin*. Much of Fosse's original choreography seems to be adapted to fit this production. Unlike Stephen Schwartz's score, the choreography feels as modern as if it was invented today.

If I had to pick a single word to describe the production, I would probably say “modern.” It shocked me, again and again, how well the framework of the story fits today's culture. The structure of the original production feels episodic and distracted (evidenced by listening to the cast album, or even attempting to describe in which time period the original production is meant to take place). At first glance, the “musical in a video game” seems gimmicky, but in truth it solved more problems than it created. The video game setup explains away the episodic nature of the production. In addition, this rushed aesthetic—especially present in act one—seems to match the internet subculture, where you can become “famous” (or at least notorious) for a single video on Youtube, and where cultural trends seem to change in the blink of an eye, rather perfectly. The scene in which Pippin raised support to overthrow his father through a series of tweets felt unnervin

it will be very interesting to track its reception on a larger, multi-national scale. After all, *Pippin*



very beginning of the play, where we see a girl singing poetically, but then a sudden transition to an extremely loud, dark, but flashing red rave party in the woods with flashing lights and sound of loud music (which I later found out was a song called “Invaders Must Die” by The Prodigy). This music was bound to wake up anyone in the theater that had even the slightest inclination towards falling asleep. I was one of those people after a long day, but this loud rave scene woke me up and caused me to stay awake for the remainder of the performance. Technically, I wasn’t really following what the lights were doing because I was so shocked by the sudden transition to the rave party in the woods that I didn’t care. I was too busy laughing about it and enjoying it to actually take note of what was going on with the lighting, even though I know it must have been something complicated and amazing. An even funnier moment was the abrupt ending to all of this, where we are brought to a silence of the morning after, and back to natural daytime lighting in a forest, only to be greeted by drunk and/or hung-over characters who reminded me of an American stoner-

all beaten and bloody, his son appears. Rylance quickly turned away in shame, as he did not want his son to see how badly he had been beaten. The moment was powerful because of the child's silence and little use of words when he did speak, while Rylance brilliantly handled the scene in the way in which a father who rarely sees his soon would handle the situation in real life.

In class discussion before this performance, we touched on a theme of this production. The demise of British culture was meaningful in the play because it made allusions to a short poem by William Blake that said, "And did those feats in ancient time." The main theme here is that England was no longer a place like Jerusalem (a place of love and peace). It was a challenge in British society to restore England to the days where it was more like a "heaven" in a healthy relationship with its past.

– William Hogan (Class of 2012; Psychology)

What in the world?

I'm not sure how to react to this play, really. It was funny and sad and shocking and crude and refined and all of these things at the same time. Even now, as I think back, the first thing that pops to mind is Rooster Byron's grinning visage. While I wouldn't quite call him a

rife with mythological motifs and imagery, and I only wished that I took better notes during the play itself.

Still, let me attempt to tackle what I'd like to address. The protagonist is very satyr-like – it is clear that he's a drug dealer, an alcoholic, and overall not what anyone would call a productive member of society. However, he is undeniably charismatic, and this is why he reminds me so much of the Arthurian legends that I love. Johnny Rooster Byron is very Arthurian. He holds to his own ideals, he leads by example, and his tale ends in much the same depressing way as Arthur's. Whereas Arthur took upon the burdens of kingship for a grander purpose, however, Byron's is ...

Actually, I do not think I could accuse Byron's motives of being impure or selfish. He does not seem to derive any particular benefits from having all of these juvenile miscreants around. I cannot argue that his motives are less noble than Arthur's because there are many things we do not know. The telltale hints in which we see – the scene involving the May Queen girl, for instance –

everything else that he stood for. He is the Dragon<sup>4</sup> as the city council is the St. George of our tale. Because of their diametrically opposed “positions,” his son will never be able to understand him in the same way as he would have liked – they’re raised in different worlds, and I really think that the son belongs in the same world as us – we who are ordinary.

That raises another interesting question, too. What is best for young people? Young people like to think that they know, and not-young people like to tell young people that they’re wrong. In that sense, I see the protagonist as a mentor figure. In his realm – a mystical, magical wood – they can have their hedonistic revelries without the bindings of civilization and the trappings of rules. From his conversation with his friend, however, we get the idea that many of the kids he interacted with move on to other things in life. While I do not adhere to this particular school of thought, I am aware that some folks advocate experience as the ultimate way to learn. After all, how would one know a hangover is painful if one has never experienced one?

The play also communicated a great sense of loss. I think this is most relevant to me, and it’s really a great testament to the timelessness of theatre that the same production could affect people so differently. I came to England seeking England’s rich myth and legends. Arthur. Robin Hood. St. George. Yes. As childish as it sounds, I came here to England looking for King Arthur. I found nothing. Apart from *Jerusalem*, I couldn’t find even a reference. Other than the Robin Hood play on our schedule, there’s not a shred of the mythological tradition anywhere in London. It’s almost as if the tales have been stamped out. Heck, I’ve seen more advertisements for *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic* than I could count!

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<sup>4</sup> To respond to Professor Peck’s query on my journal: I think this analogy can indeed be reversed. Just as the city council see him as a threat, so does Johnny Rooster see the city, with all of their money wheedling and “urbanization” plans, as his personal dragon to slay. It makes sense that our “unorthodox” St. George would be trying to remove what he perceives to be the negative -

To me, what made England England was the fact that these myths existed. Perhaps my overly romanticized view is wholly inaccurate and not at all suitable for the modern day, but I felt that this sensation of loss warranted some commentary. I think this must be similar to what Johnny Rooster was feeling at the end. At the end, in which he invoked a host of names familiar to avid readers – Gog and Magog, Yggdrasil, Wodan, – I thought to myself: is this all that is left? Has England become so modernized that this is, in essence, the last “champion” of the old ways?

I come from China. We have a proud five-thousand-year history with more legends than many would believe to be possible. Within the last five years or so, there have been large public outcries at what many perceived as cultural invasion, and interest in what is perceived to be

dealt with extremely diverse subjects, they have all been fairly conventional theatre. This, on the other hand, was much more experimental.

When we entered the theatre for *The Animals and Children Took to the Streets*, the only things visible on stage were three screens. The ushers were all in costume and distributing a mysterious confectionary known as “Granny’s Gumdrops” while providing no explanation for this action. Devin, who was sitting next to me, was the recipient of a pack of gumdrops. After handing him the candy, the usher, with a deadpan expression and a voice full of world-weary indifference, advised him, “Don’t eat them all at once.” This created an extremely immersive feel to the play and immediately set the audience to wondering what role the candies would play in the show. When it was later revealed, after the audience had already eaten them, that the candies were a plot device used to deliver mind-altering drugs to children, it provided the audience with a delightfully stomach-turning moment. Overall, I thought that this was a clever gimmick which was a unique way to make the audience feel involved in the performance.

Once the show began, it became apparent that it was a very different type of play than anything we had seen thus far. There were only three actors in the production, each of whom played multiple roles throughout the course of the play. The set consisted only of the three screens we had noticed when we entered the theatre. Onto these screens, animation was projected to create the play’s various locations. The projections were far more than mere set dressing, however. They were dynamic and bursting with life, and there were even several characters, such as Evie Eaves, who existed only as cartoons. By using cartoons to create the world of the play, the animators were able to create a magnificently surreal and nightmarish cityscape in which nothing seemed too terrible to be outside of the realm of possibility. The decision to use animation so heavily opened up a plethora of possibilities which would not have

been feasible if the creators of the play had tried to create them in physical reality. For example, the way in which the hordes of wild children were depicted, as a roiling, soulless black mass, created a striking effect. It brilliantly illustrated the way the children of the bayou were viewed by the adults – both their parents and the officials of the city – as mobs of indistinguishable hellions with no individual personalities. This depiction served to highlight the plight of the children, who are caught between various factions and ultimately wind up suffering for it. And this effect was only possible because it was executed through animation. It was also interesting that there were no conventional theatre lights used in this performance. Instead, the actors were lit solely by the projectors. This created an interesting effect, as the diffuse front lighting made the actors appear very flat, making them seem to blend seamlessly into the cartoons.

And then, as if all of these other things were not enough, this play was also a musical. Music is the most direct method for eliciting an emotional reaction from an audience. This music was extremely atmospheric and very effective at heightening the emotional tone of each scene. Overall, I felt that this play was most effective at evoking a particular mood, which I find difficult to put into words, and the music was a huge element contributing to this tone. Most of the energy of the play was put into creating this mood, to the point that the actual story became almost a secondary concern.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

The play featured an all-female cast of just three actresses. The first kept the entire choreography on tempo throughout the production by playing the piano. The other two actresses did an impressive job portraying a litany of characters, with rapid-fire costume changes. To portray the male undertaker, one actress donned a turban-like wig of outrageous hair while the character's deep voice was provided by the voiceover of a male narrator. The precision required for the entire show was admirable, as any mistiming would



between idealistic and realistic endings. The audience exuberantly rooted for the idealistic ending, which offered a glimmer of hope in a hopeless world. Meanwhile, I swam against the stream and cynically cheered for a crushing reality. In spite of its best efforts, the crowd discovered it was impotent in its attempt to alter fate as the Caretaker grimly headed down the path of realism. Although we were offered the promise of choice, I suspect that the realistic ending was the only possible path. Sugarcoated idealism had no place in the Bayou.

Regardless, I couldn't help but feel partially complicit in the events that followed. Grandma's gumdrops were successfully distributed throughout the Bayou, pacifying the children and quelling their rebellious spirit. The Caretaker, having spent his savings rescuing poor little Evie Eaves, was unable to escape the Bayou Mansions in a repetition of the neighborhood's sad refrain: born in the Bayou die in the Bayou. This message is depressingly relevant in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions and the ongoing Occupy Wall Street protests across America. The masses are powerless to effect change as long as the powerful continue to suppress them.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

**Reasons to be Pretty (2008)**  
**Written by Neil LaBute**  
**Dir. Michael Attenborough**  
**Almeida Theatre**

I was extremely excited for this play going into the trip for multiple reasons. It's no secret that I love Neil LaBute, and I also happen to be a big *Doctor Who* fan. This production starred Billie Piper, who was the tenth Doctor's companion for two seasons. I also thought that LaBute was directing this production because of the syllabus, so I was disappointed that it wasn't the case, but it was well done so it didn't really matter. Also, the actor who played Kent talked with us for

a while after the show and told us that LaBute actually came to a few rehearsals and was involved in the process.

This show is a great example of how to use technical design to enhance the themes of a script. The set was a storage container, which emphasizes the theme that our bodies are our containers and that they are important to us. The main conflict between Steph and Greg is all about her container and what Greg said about it. It was tragic to me that Greg never actually told Steph that she was pretty until after she got dressed up. I do not think this was intentional on Greg's part; I think he just couldn't get his words together until then, but it is tragic for Steph because it reinforced her insecurities. The "container" theme also shows through with the character of Crystal. Kent constantly talks about her and how beautiful she is, but the character is never brought onstage. This allows each audience member to picture his or her own standard of beauty and therefore make Crystal the most beautiful woman in the world. But if the idea of Crystal had been put into the container of an actress's body then the il(l)-2-2(i)-'s body paa(r)3( of i)--2(n)4

and measures to enhance the sheer silence and boredom that the characters are experiencing at

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of the container set runs muc

director did. Greg's speech seems to me to make many of the implied messages and themes of the play explicit for the audience, giving them a "take home message." By including this speech, I feel that the play would lose much of its subtlety and become only about the message, instead of the journey which takes us there. It was interesting to notice, however, how many of the students on our trip were able to tell that the ending had been changed. After the play, many expressed that they had been surprised when the play ended, saying that what we saw did not "feel" like an ending. This shows that audiences will often be able to sense if an ending has been altered, even if they do not know exactly what they are sensing.

After the play ended, a number of us remained in the theatre to try to get autographs from the cast. Not only were we successful in this, getting autographs from all four cast members, but Kieran Bew who played Kent stayed and talked to us for a long time. He seemed very interested in the Theatre in England trip, and told us some interesting stories about his experiences in theatre. When it came up that we would be seeing *Measure for Measure* in Stratford the following day, he told us that he knew the actor (Raymond Coulthard) who was playing Duke Vincentio and asked us to say hi for him. This was a very nice experience, and continues a trend which several members of our group pointed out – that often, the meaner a character is, the nicer the actor playing that character will be.

– Kevin McCarthy (Class of 2012; Biomedical Engineering)

**Measure for Measure (1604)**  
**Written by William Shakespeare**  
**Dir. Roxana Silbert**  
**Swan Theatre**

Wednesday, January 4

I find it very telling to compare the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2011 production of *Measure for Measure*, directed by Roxana Silbert, with Ian Rickson's *Hamlet*. The latter production

props—human lamps in the former and a fountain in the latter. These women are literally turned into property, and they reflect the problematic nature of Angelo's desire to possess Isabella.

There's a sense of social discomfort with S&M in modern-day society, but the fact of the matter is that the sexual practice is traditionally consensual. At its best, S&M effectively fulfills both parties' sexual passion through the application of discipline. It's an extreme sort of contract, but in a way it parallels the marriage contract that was seen as an effective way to couch sexual passion through socially acceptable discipline. Even the ideas of dominant and subordinate roles applied as married women had significantly fewer rights in society than men. I don't think Silbert's production necessarily draws this direct parallel, but I think the idea of a successful combination of discipline and passion is presented by Duke Vincentio (Raymond Coulthard), who proposes marriage to Isabella at the end. The Duke is the first person who appears onstage, attired in a costume that includes discreet bondage elements—a thick leather belt, for example. This contrasts with the studded leather jacket worn by Pompey (Joseph Kloska) or the sheer undershirt worn by Lucio (Paul Chahidi)—by contrast, the Duke presents an effective study in moderation even as he insists upon endearingly showy magic tricks throughout the play.

The Duke's use of magic (which is not part of the original Shakespeare script) is only one of the ways in which the RSC's production moves beyond the moral-focused context of the problem play to provide great amounts of humor. While on some level S&M is about discipline, it also has heavy associations with sexual liberation in modern society. This is reflected best in the play during the rowdy, and hilarious curtain call—the actors dance around one another, faux-slapping and kissing each other in turn (or doing even sillier things—I noticed a girl pretending to pinch Barnardine's nipples, to his great amusement, and Lucio waving the hand of the babydoll that represented his illegitimate son at the end of the play!). They all appear amused



and excited to be joking around after the performance, and it's incredibly fun to watch as an audience. There is an overwhelming enthusiasm that pervades the comic moments of the play—the Duke, Pompey, Lucio and Barnardine especially endeared themselves to the audience through the energy they brought to creating humorous moments, especially in the latter half of the play.

With the exception of the utterly Dionysian curtain call, the body of the production doesn't advocate for sexually liberal behavior (as proven though the extreme trials of Claudius and his very pregnant, semi-spouse Juliet), but it does accept that passion is natural and healthy for human beings. After all, as Pompey half-jokingly asks the government officials who plan to close all the whore houses, "Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?" In short, the aesthetic and setting of the RSC production of *Measure for Measure* rather consistently help audiences focus on and understand key aspects of one of Shakespeare's lesser-known plays.

– Sara Cohen (Class of 2012; English)

The second Shakespeare play which we saw on this trip, *Measure for Measure*, was extremely different from the first. Unlike *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure* is a comedy. However, it is not a typical Shakespearean comedy, but is considered one of Shakespeare's "problem plays."

However, this production did not have any problems with the comedic aspects of *Measure for Measure*, since this was easily the funniest production of a Shakespeare play I have ever seen.

There were many things to love about this production. I will talk first about the acting. There were no weak links in this enormous cast, and we were privileged to see many varied and entertaining performances. However, Raymond Coulthard who played Duke Vincentio, rose

above the rest and joins Michael Sheen and Mark Rylance (from *Jerusalem*) as one of the finest actors I have seen on this trip. The Duke is a difficult role to shine in, as he never has any



was the dog, who was acted by a person who played the clarinet to create the dog's voice. This appealed greatly to the children in the audience because of how well the actor conveyed dog-like qualities through body posture and the clarinet noises. Other animals in the play were also acted by people and represented with various instruments, such as the horses as trombones and the swan as a trumpet with a mute. Although this aspect was very child-friendly, it also seemed geared for adults in the sense that it was reminiscent of the animals-as-instruments concept in "Peter and the Wolf."

Even though this production was geared quite a bit for a child audience, there were many instances which were more adult in theme and sometimes very violent. The death of the Sheriff of Nottingham was particularly macabre in that Robin Hood and his gang decide to use his body as a puppet to gain entry to the castle and save Martin of Sherwood (who is really Marion). The



This entire set was brilliant because every detail on it brought out the whimsy of the script and made adults watch in child-like awe of its technical mastery.

I could talk forever about the tech, but I'm going to switch gears to actually talk about the show because there is a lot to explore on that avenue as well. This script is particularly interesting because unlike all of the Robin Hood stories I have seen, Maid Marian is the protagonist. Not only that, but she is the one who dresses up in the traditional "Robin Hood" garb and steals from the rich to give to the poor. Meanwhile Robin Hood is a macho, selfish, gorgeous, "emotionally unavailable" scoundrel who is only transformed through the love of Maid Marian and her actions as Martin of Sherwood. I thought it was an imaginative revitalization of an old story, and also great for young children to see a female protagonist kicking ass and taking names instead of playing the damsel in distress, as is often the case. The level of violence in the show struck me as a bit intense for children at times, such as the cutting out and waving around of a tongue, or Prince John's telling Robin that he will lock him in a dungeon and cut off one body part every year on his anniversary. There were some conceits, however, such as the bright red harness on the shoulders of the father when he is hanged, that helped lessen the darker elements of the show. They could have easily disguised the harness, but instead they made it very noticeable so as not to scare the children too much. What fun would it be if they weren't a little frightened?

Other characters geared towards children (but still fun for me) include Pierre, who serves as a sort of "Buttons" character, and the animals played by instrumentalists. There were percussionist horses, a cello wild boar, a trumpet goose, and of course a clarinet dog. This style seemed to be a live-action *Peter and the Wolf* with the way that the sound of the instrument often matched the movement of the animals. What I thought was particularly clever was that they did

not costume the actors in animal furs or any literal animal outfits. The dog's hair was styled in a

would say it was definitely worth missing dinner for, although later that evening I might not have said so.

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

**Written on the Heart (2011)**

**Written by David Edgar**

**Dir. Gregory Doran**

**Swan Theatre**

In an intriguing dramatization,



divine intervention and his opinions still reflect a personal Puritanical bias. In the play's final line, Tyndale stares directly into Andrewes' eyes and quotes that when reading the translation Andrewes will see his face reflecting back. No matter how deeply you look, you'll see the human face of Tyndale, not God.

The Bible is a fractal of controversy: no matter how deeply you focus, a new layer of ambiguity emerges. Even seemingly minor quibbles could result in conflict. However, when dealing with a text as influential as the Word of God the distinction between "love" and "charity" can have profound implications. Although they appear closely synonymous, charity denotes love for the sake of God. The difference between "church" and "congregation" similarly appears

sympathize when characters resisted Puritanical orders to destroy all religious imagery; I did not want to see the stained glass destroyed.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

I was really impressed by both of the sets at the Swan theatre. As I was looking at the ornate and jaw-droppingly gorgeous set I thought to myself, do they build the set for each show every time? Or are there parts that they reuse and repurpose? Despite the opulent set, the play was aurally focused. *Dublin Carol* was also aurally focused, but the staging of *Written on the Heart* didn't add much. I felt that I could have gotten just as much out of the play if I only listened to it. The staging didn't seem to be planned for that type of stage so I saw the actors' backs and set. Since I didn't see much of the action, I was tuned into the sounds of the play, and I noticed and loved that they incorporated the Anglican music tradition into the performance. It was a perfect choice because it allowed us as an audience to see the beauty of the ceremonies that the characters were fighting for and to allow us to understand a fraction of that reverence for the rituals of the church.

I thought it was a really touching and humanizing moment when the Bishop took the chalice from the chaplain. The way he looked at it just revealed how much both of them loved these rituals of the church. I thought it was an interesting way to continue the line of similarities between the two characters. To me the only difference was that Lancelot had grown old and no longer had the same, almost radical, views that he did in his youth.

Oddly enough, I was reminded of constitutional law in the U.S. while watching the play. There is this issue of youth fighting for change and the elderly fighting to keep the traditions. The play and constitutional law have the idea of preservation in common. There was a great line

in the play that said that translating the Bible shouldn't be what one wants it to say but what it actually says. That reminded me of constitutional law because there are two schools of thought in the interpretation of our Constitution: verbatim vs. in the spirit that it was written. In *Written on the Heart*, it seemed to me that this was also the key point of contention between the different Bishops. After watching the play, I want to look at the different Bibles they were talking about so that I can see how the translations differ.

– Katie Lewis (Class of 2012; Music)

Richard II

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Although he walked and spoke with a kingly air, many of Richard's impetuous actions foreshadowed his inevitable downfall. This is most evident in his judgment of Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray, who are both suspected in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. Richard arranges a duel between the two but cancels it shortly after they put on their armor. As an audience member hoping to see a fight, I could empathize with the characters' frustration when Richard called them from the fight on a whim. The entire duel was built up as a show, and he had already made the arbitrary decision to exile both offenders. When he then goes on to frivolously shorten the sentence of his cousin Henry, Richard appears even more impulsive. These decisions reflect an immaturity in the young leader that contradicts his previous image as a wise ruler.

By the end of the act, Henry had returned to England to claim his father's estate and seize the throne from Richard. However, by this point the young king is still unfazed. As the act came to a close, Richard again stood alone on stage, looming from the balcony. He outstretched his arms as if to bestow a divine gift upon the theater below while an ethereal spotlight gave him a divine glow. Far from being confined to the stage, his presence stretched over all England, encompassing t-14(g)6(l)-(h)10(e)3om

characters were acting very carefully in order to appease Richard, as they were wary of being considered usurpers.

Richard is then imprisoned in the Tower of London, a shadow of his former self. There, Richard sorrowfully lamented his past life — how quickly things had fallen apart. Physically representing the passage of time, Redmayne ticked his arms like a clock counting down the hours. This context gave Richard a believable desperation, suitable for his reckless attack against the guards who had been sent to poison him.

The play's final scene paralleled the introduction. Richard again takes center stage, but now his body is concealed within a plain, wooden coffin. Henry kneels above the box in prayer, symbolically embracing his newfound role as religious leader.

– Jonathan Raybin (Class of 2012; Chemistry)

I was surprised by the simplicity of this production's unchanging set, but after seeing the entire production and its religious overtones, the church-like appearance of the stage and its connection to Richard's "divine" position as ruler, I realize it would have been somewhat less effective to attempt to portray settings realistically. What the production lacked in visual cues, it more than made up for in lighting, sound and costumes. Because the set was so unadorned, the changes in lighting and sound were much more noticeable, and the background noises of horses, seagulls, or birds in a garden really allowed us in the audience to use our imaginations. For a script as rich in imagery as this one, the choice to focus on certain technical aspects over realism in the environment was a crucial one, but it worked because of the religious imagery that found more than its share of representation in the visual set. Certain directorial choices (such as Richard's pre-show position in his throne, and his almost crucified gesture just before intermission) made

Richard's religious authority a highlight of this production. These moments were also noticeably the only times when the audience saw Richard alone, during his time as King. This is significant in that the play focuses to a certain extent on Richard's identity crisis, and also the idea of loyalty: loyalty to kin, to the ruling monarch, and to God. In some cases there is no conflict (since the monarch is supposedly divinely appointed), but the play also shows the difficulty of choosing between king and kin, as in the case of the Duke of York. Bolingbroke's conflict was not so explicit, as he was not technically committing treachery by returning to England, but he clearly still opposed the King in Richard's justification for seizing Bolingbroke's inheritance. The separation between them was nicely seen in the use of the two levels of the set, which could portray separate scenes or merge them together, as in the scene when Richard comes "down court" to give his crown to Bolingbroke. That scene alone was exquisitely done, not only in staging Richard's conflict with Bolingbroke by showing them both with a hand on the crown, but also in Eddie Redmayne's portrayal of Richard's insecurity and uncertainty about his position and identity without the royal authority.

This goes back to the primary way in which Richard's moments alone on stage were important; that is, his journey through the play is one in which he repeatedly questions his identity. During his last monologue in prison, he compares his cell to the world, finding the only real difference in the fact that he is not surrounded by people in prison. Instead, he is accompanied by his thoughts, which he compares to people (the children of his brain and soul) and, through this, makes himself into many people ("Thus play I in one person many people / and none contented"). Along the theme of loyalty again, the person who intrudes on Richard's solitude is, notably, one of the few friends who have remained loyal to him. His insecurity is apparent before prison, however, as when he responds, "I have forgot myself" to Aumerle's

“Remember who you are.” The idea of flattery, as well, which is continually mentioned by others in their criticism of Richard, is clearly seen in his speech about the Earth after returning from Ireland, and the great pride that he takes in his position as King. One of the moments during

Let me just begin by quickly discussing existentialism here. As far as I understand – and, let’s be honest, no one completely understands existentialism, not even Sartre – existentialism is the idea that no human can understand the machinations of the universe, so life is essentially meaningless. However, existentialism also states that your life is ultimately what you imagine it to be. For example, the three tortured souls in *Huis Clos* all enter the “hotel room” expecting to find some sort of torture. They already expect that they are entering Hell, so that is what it becomes for them. It is impossible to determine whether or not the situation could have turned out better had they approached the room as if it were Heaven. But the connection is still there; they expected to end up in Hell, and that is exactly where they are by the conclusion.

Next, let me gush about the quality of the one hour and fifty minute performance given by all three actors. No breaks. No scene changes. No intermissions. That takes enormous





modern music that was playing before the show started and other references to pop culture.

Adults enjoy a lot of the references made throughout the show and just having a show to sit back and enjoy with their children. It's very hard to have a show that appeals to all ages and I think that the pantomime tradition is a great way to bring the family together.

One aspect I personally enjoyed was the music, especially the songs. I love musical theater, so it was fun to have the songs in the show since we didn't end up seeing an exorbitant amount of musicals on the trip. The best part was that there were actually many musical theater references in the songs and throughout the show. A couple songs were parodies of well-known musical theater songs (like "I Just Can't Wait To Be King" from *The Lion King*) and others were just small references. I noticed references to at least six references to different musicals: *The Lion King*, *Gypsy*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Annie*. The songs were all very fun and upbeat; they definitely served to keep the audience entertained.

The show was definitely meant to be laid-back and fun. There were times where you could see Buttons and Cinderella breaking character to laugh at themselves. I thought that this fit the show and kept in the spirit of lightheartedness and fun. However, I think that the show could have been even better with some more concentration on acting. The show was naturally a lot of fun, which the actors were great at keeping up with. However, I felt like some of the acting could have been better, specifically from the Fairy Godmother and Cinderella. A little more thought put into their lines would have helped their comedic timing, which would have made the show even better and funnier.

One thing I was very impressed with were the kids in the show. They were great dancers and very disciplined. It was obvious they were having a lot of fun but they also seemed really focused on their performance. I enjoyed paying particular attention to their choreography and



children engaged in the story by letting them be the only ones who knew the answers to questions like where the spider was or where the key was hidden. Buttons' various games, as well, were clearly meant as a distraction from the story purely to keep youngsters entertained.

Despite its obvious pandering to a very young audience, however, the tale of Cinderella and the Prince is a nice case illustrating the idea of mistaken identity. While the Prince

occasional socio-cultural references kept adults paying attention, the show engaged its younger viewers through a combination of audience participation in games, in helping answer questions to advance the storyline, and of course with rewards for randomly selected children at the end.

– Meridel Phillips (Class of 2012; Physics and English: Theater)

**The Charity that Began at Home (1906)**

**Written by St. John Hankin**

**Dir. Auriol Smith**

**The Orange Tree Theatre**

After



china, and real silverware being placed properly. I just thought that moment exemplified how this play took small moments and made them seem important to the audience.

– Devin Goodman (Class of 2015; Physics; Minor: English)

This play was a wonderful satire on Edwardian society and cultural mores. However, the most interesting parts of the play were when it explored the limits of charity and the selfish aspects of such an act. For example, the idea that rang most strongly with me was Verreker's idea that people have ideals for others but not for themselves. For him, charity exists as a way for uppity people to force others to adhere to their ideas of what people should be like. That comes to fruition when it is revealed to all of the guests why they have been invited to the house party. The Denison women thought they were being kind by inviting dis-likable people to their party, but the guests are – unsurprisingly – insulted when they discover that they have been invited because people do not like them. That is how comedy is turned into a social commentary, because idealism does not work in the real world.

In *The Charity That Began at Home*, St. John Hankin was trying to move beyond simple melodrama, because that often became a joke, and he wanted to create something with deeper social implications. Influenced by George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, he created a 'new drama' that treated serious themes in a comic manner, which explains the tensions between charity and selfishness in the play. One of the limits of charity is towards the lower classes, where selfish social structures won out over charitable intentions. That was most evident in Mrs. Denison's dealings with Ansen, one of the maids employed in the household. Instead of taking pity on her situation (the butler has taken advantage of her), Mrs. Denison ignores her presence in the room and discusses her fate as if she were a piece of furniture. A person trying to be truly

charitable towards Ansen would send her to live with her mother (probably with a small sum of money) and would fire Soames (the butler). However, Mrs. Denison is too kind and wants to take pity on Soames as well. That is where her charity goes too far and she fails to see the humanity necessary in this situation, instead of naïve idealism.

I was also very impressed by the character who played Verreker, because of his ability to remain outside of the action and appreciate the irony, which made his facial expressions priceless.

– Rebecca Kennedy (Class of 2012; English)

**Billy Elliot: The Musical (2005)**  
**Book and Lyrics by Lee Hall**  
**Dir. Stephen Daldry**  
**Victoria Palace Theatre**

Saturday, January 7



his character exhibited in the play. The show had wonderful technical elements overall. It used

walked off the stage, right in front of my seat, and then made his way into the aisle to walk down it, indicating that he was on his way to London for auditions at the prestigious ballet school. In terms of plot, it was nice to see his dad finally supporting his aspirations, and he genuinely expressed being proud of Billy when Billy sang the “Electricity” song, which took place at the end of his audition in response to a question along the lines of “How does ballet dancing make you feel?” It was hilarious to see his father point to himself afterwards while saying unDiehis breath, “That’s my son!” And after that, he did a little twist dance thing that caused the audience, including myself, to break into laughter. This was a terrific and comical expression of his father’s support for his son’s passion for the ballet.

– William Hogan (Class of 2012; Psychology)

I was very, very excited to get to see *Billy Elliot* in London. It was probably the single show I was most excited to see. For one, I love musicals so this was automatically a cause for excitement. Secondly, it changes it a bit to see it in England rather than in the United States. Like *War Horse*, I felt that it was more meaningful to see *Billy Elliot* in London, where the history of the show is rooted. I felt more connected to the show personally and also more connected with the audience in general who had probably talked about more of the historical significance and background in school than we would have in the United States.

One theme that I really took away from this show was the idea of solidarity and sticking together. At the very beginning of the show, a projector is playing that gives background and history on what is going on during this time period with the strikes and Maggie Thatcher. This puts the audience on the same page--even if some people have more historical knowledge of the

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themselves into the show. The very first song then continues bringing the audience (and the rest







He told us about his experiences in brothels, made a parallel between music and sex in a brothel, and even implied at one point that women will never be equal to men. We learn later that he stabbed his wife in an intense moment where he entered his home while she was having dinner with the man with whom he thought she was having an affair. There was no evidence of this other than the man telling us it is what he thought was happening. The only physical contact he could describe was his wife rubbing the leg of the violinist. The man recalls this stroking occurring in the moments right before an altercation that led to his murdering her. We also learn later that he was acquitted of the crime and part of the significance of the title is that the Kreutzer Sonata is the musical piece that reminds him of his wife, and his miserable life with her.

The emotions expressed by Hilton McRae (Posdnyshev) felt so real. He presented himself as the perfect mix between the sane and insane. At times it was hard to detect if he was in fact insane. It is possible that he just *perceived* his wife as cheating on him, even so much so that he *thought* he saw her rubbing the leg of the violinist in the scene he described that eventually led to the tragic outcome. Additionally, even though he was giving a monologue, and that was the entire show, he was not the only actor in the show. We also had his wife and the violinist, who were acting behind a screen. They would appear only when lights would shine on them, and it would show them dancing together, or playing a duet. At other times we would see Posdnyshev's wife sitting on a couch, as he was describing her features, especially her wide eyes, which he emphasized repeatedly in the monologue.

The lighting was beautiful. It was so well done that at first it was hard to tell if what I was seeing were just images projected on a screen three dimensionally, or if there were actors behind the screen. The screen was for the most part translucent, but it could be made transparent with the proper lighting. For sound, there was not much to it, but we could hear the faint sound of a

train running, since the show took place entirely on a train. Also, we heard beautiful classical music, which was played live by the other two actors behind the screen. There was a real grand



names by publishers.<sup>5</sup> Naming the novella after Beethoven's "The Ghost" Trio would have been equally as appropriate, since the alleged affair between Pozdnyshev's wife and the violinist

painful rendition of the title work showed a lack of integrity and understanding. Further, it showed a lack of respect for the audience - that is to say - the directors either could not hear themselves how badly the music was being played or they assumed that the audience would neither notice nor care.

A tarantella is featured in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Death & the Maiden*, and *A Doll's House*. In each, the tarantella is played while the protagonist loses control, surrendering and giving power to their most terrifying fears. Legend has it that dancing the tarantella was a spider-bite victim's last chance for survival, and that the dance itself resembles the movement of a tarantula, limbs whirling everywhere. Pozdnyshov's tarantella, at the play's climax, is his surrender to murderous rage, all based on the primal suspicion of her infidelity, for which logic is lost.

– Lauren Haley (Class of 2013; Music: Violin Performance)

**Twelfth Night (1601)**  
**Written by William Shakespeare**  
**Dir. Mark Leipacher**  
**New Diorama Theatre**

The most interesting aspect of this production of *Twelfth Night* was the unique staging. Because it was done in a black box theater, there was no set and very few props. There weren't even any projections onto the walls to help the audience imagine the setting. This resulted in a very 'artsy' feel to the play. What I mean by this is that the audience and actors were not helped by fancy stage lighting and background sets, but theater was stripped to its most raw elements: actors, stage, and audience. It was a very intimate setting and would probably put off many less avid theater-goers who are used to a more 'traditional' setting with a large stage and more of a set.

The lack of a set also required the actors to be very physically fit, because they often had to act

**Stones in His Pocket(1996)**  
**Written by Marie Jones**  
**Dir. Indhu Rubasingham**  
**Tricycle Theatre**

I think that this play is a perfect example that of the fact that, however incredible it may be, a fancy set does not make a performance. These two actors on a bare set put on a performance that was more intense and funny than some of the shows with million dollar budgets. This performance was an incredible tale and so well put on that when I think back to it, I remember several times as many actors onstage than there actually were. There were at least twelve roles that I can remember, and only two moments of confusion where I couldn't tell who the character was supposed to be, but both of these were due to them being bit parts that only appeared once. The tapestry that these men wove was astounding. In any and all previous occasions that I had seen a production where many parts were being played by a few actors, there were always costume pieces that would differentiate the different characters. However, that would be too easy for this performance. Instead, the actors differentiated each character purely through physical and verbal differences, which is a challenge even with one or two characters. To keep each character straight in their minds while acting each of them out must have been an ordeal that I would never want to experience.

There were only two things that were portrayed using anything other than the actors' abilities: the location and whether or not the movie's cameras were rolling. This was instead portrayed entirely through lighting and sound changes. The design for these changes was incredible, with each feeling like an entirely separate environment. By letting the audience fill in the gaps with their imagination, the entire play had a much richer experience. I would really like to see more of this sort thing, since I enjoy letting my imagination fill in a scene and I really enjoy complex and interesting sound and light designs. All the directors for the shows I've







the two actors as they jumped between characters. The dynamics between in-group and out-group were also shown to be important. Charlie was a character who was not from the particular village where the play takes place, but he was still from Ireland which placed him more in the in-group versus the actors and film crew which arrived from America to shoot the film. These characters were held with a little more disdain by the local characters. They were seen as an imposing force since they were creating a movie about Ireland with the only authentically Irish participants playing extras. Finally, there was the comparison between film and theater, with film depicted as a shallower, more superficial medium of storytelling. Film always has a happy ending whereas theater oftentimes shows the more realistic side of tragedy. This is shown within this play by the film crew's dismissal of Sean's tragic drowning so that they can pursue the happy ending that they have created for their own film.

– Nika Tamashiro (Class of 2012; Japanese and Brain & Cognitive Science)

**13 (2011)**

Sunday, January 8

**Written by Mike Bartlett**

**Dir. Thea Sharrock**

**Olivier Theatre**

I think I liked *13* so much because it seemed very science fiction-y, and I don't know if I've even seen a science fiction play. I loved that the play wasn't clear. I know that was a lot of the other students' biggest complaint, but I think that everyone kept coming back to the unsolved puzzle trying to figure out the play. I think that because we keep coming back to it, trying to find satisfaction, the play is a success. To me the play had a goal of inciting us to think about how the action onstage relates to the world we're living in. Bartlett wrote the play to dramatize the times we are living in now, to comment on our interrupted attention spans. With every pop culture





the soldier. As the storytelling simplified, the play became less movie-like and more linear, which is what I expect from a play.

The set was impressive. It reminded me of the set for *Die Meistersinger*; seeming largely minimalist but really versatile and advanced. I kept being surprised by how the set could be

first moment when the cube grows translucent and you can see all of the characters are inside, the club sequence, the moment when John knows in advance that it's going to rain, etc.) are moments that suggest there might be something otherworldly about the plot. This surreal imagery is sustained through the very end of the production—the sequence where the characters all watch Youtube videos on their glowing iPads has a kind of surrealism to it, even though it's a completely realistic moment. Or perhaps by this point, the moment isn't sci-fi so much as high-tech.

But as far as the more extreme science fiction elements go, nearly all the effects created by the technological capabilities of the stage rather than moments deep in the script itself, seem totally bizarre. The effect it creates is similar to what would happen if Obama wore a Superman costume to deliver his State of the Union address. It would be interesting, eye-catching, and totally random. But it would generate attention, and a media field-day. It might even distract from his meaning long enough that we're shocked when he reaches his conclusion. Most importantly, if the President never explained his actions, the people would come up with a variety of possible meanings and maybe spend more time analyzing the outfit than the speech. The tech in *I3* is similarly distracting—my favorite moments in the production all seemed to detract from, rather than contribute to the central political and social message of the piece. I still maintain that they could have been lifted from *I3* and used (more effectively!) in an entirely different play. But then, would *I3* have been nearly as interesting without such moments?

After our discussion in class, I'm beginning to realize that that might have been the point. It could be that Sharrock uses technologically-generated spectacle to parallel the discussion of a single, apocalyptic dream in the play. It's a dream that the media has created, a dream that comes specifically from a world that is full of technology that amazes and terrifies, that saves and kills



non-specificity is a motif throughout the production; at one point, someone blames Ruby's murder on John's failure to use specificity in his speeches. The lack of specificity in the plot isn't entirely clear at first because the technological aspects of the production are so stunning, the play's genre is ambiguous, and the storyline is so fractured. These elements of the production can absolutely be read as a metaphor for media spin...and yet, they can be read as almost any kind of statement about modern society. That's the beauty, and problem, of ambiguity. In this, one can justify *I3*'s fractured, ambiguous nature—but is that Bartlett's message, is it one of his many messages, or are we just yet again attempting to justify artistic choices that, due to their ambiguity, allow us to project our own ideas into the kind of murky ether that is *I3*, an ether that fails to divulge Bartlett's message at all?

– Sara Cohen (Class of 2012; English)

**The Pitmen Painters(2007)**  
**Written by Lee Hall**  
**Dir. Max Roberts**  
**Duchess Theatre**

Monday, January 9

Pride can be either a destructive or a creative force, and *The Pitmen Painters* by Lee Hall shows both sides of this coin. The Ashington pitmen are a tightly knit community who share a deep sense of accomplishment for the work they do each day in the mines. The danger of working deep underground produces simultaneous feelings of brotherly solidarity and personal pride. Outside of the mine, the miners continue their efforts toward self-improvement by enrolling in classes through the Workers' Educational Association. Their classes were intended wholly for personal enrichment, as — according to the Workers' Educational Association constitution — classroom programs could offer no marketable skills. As in the mine, community plays a central



when, in terms of mining co

these times, I had to do my best to suppress my laughter, which is a difficult process that seems to only cause me to laugh harder sometimes.

The theater that this show took place in was beautiful. There was a bright red curtain separating the audience from the stage and a magnificent chandelier used for house lights. The show itself had a very interesting plot, especially for me, because I have worked backstage in theater. Once I realized what the play was about, I developed a strong interest in this production. At first, I wasn't sure what was going on. It just seemed like a normal play set in any typical home...nothing out of the ordinary. However, I noticed a man approach the stage from behind and, by this time, I realized that a play within a play was being performed. I was intrigued by this new idea, which I had never seen performed before. It was definitely a plus that I did not have any prior knowledge of the play *Noises Off*, even though I'm positive I've heard of it before seeing it in England. Even though I've heard of it and knew it was a comedy of some sort, I had no idea that this was the premise of the play.

In my opinion, the entire production was a masterpiece. It caught my attention the entire time and I'm pretty sure I had a grin on my face for the entire second act, where we got a view of backstage during a disastrous performance. Here, we could only imagine how much the actors were panicking and improvising while onstage in front of a perceived, imaginary audience. The division of the performance into three acts was brilliant. First we got to see the show "Nothing On" in the rehearsal process, literally just hours before their opening. Then, from behind the scenes we saw how much chaos was occurring during of one of their performances. Finally, for the third act, we got to see their disastrous performance from the perspective of their audience. Basically, we were an audience watching the play *Noises Off* but were given the perspective of



an audience watching their play within a play, “Nothing On” for the entire third act. The entire thing was a comedic masterpiece.

It was certainly funny to think about the real staff of *Noises Off* and how they were

part of in this third act. Finally, the moment gets even funnier when the director of “Nothing On” enters the home as a third robber (when there is only supposed to be one), thinking that it was necessary to do so, when we can clearly see it wasn’t necessary. He recites the same lines as the fir

into the backstage feel of the show, the three separate “acts” also allowed us to change positions with each transition. In the first act, we were a part of the rehearsal; in the second, we moved between being completely isolated from the other “audience” to becoming that audience ourselves. Taking us through these different perspectives really made the inner play’s title, *Nothing On*, much more meaningful, in that there really was nothing playing for us as the audience: we were insiders on the whole scheme and so *Nothing On* meant nothing to us. The three levels of audience perspective were also nicely reflected in the detail about one of the main characters of *Nothing On*, in that we were watching a play about a play about a playwright.

The stereotypical characterization in the show also pandered to the audience’s illusions about not only theater but also the people that participate in it. Lloyd’s self-centered attitude and relationships with multiple women (Brooke’s dim-witted nature, Garry’s incapacity to finish a sentence, Belinda’s gossip, Selsdon’s forgetfulness and Tim’s lack of sleep) all play into our typical views of actors, stage managers, or directors. The passive-aggressive use of terms of

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various predictable qualities also made the second act much more comprehensible. Even the foundations laid by the first act were enough to let us understand each character's motivations and intentions as the silent drama unfolded backstage. It is a credit to all of the actors that they were able to portray such a wonderfully complex and hilarious inner story with very little dialogue as their "real" production was being simultaneously acted on the other side of the set.

Of course, just as great farce has been compared to great tragedy, the irony of shows like *Noises Off* is that they must be a perfectly executed mess in order to succeed. This production not only contained some of the very ideas of tragedy in disguise, as we spoke about in class, but also did an excellent job keeping order in a very disorderly play.

- Meridel Phillips (Class of 2012; Physics and English: Theater)

**Grief (2011)**

**Written and directed by Mike Leigh**  
**Cottesloe Theatre**

I had high expectations going into this show for many reasons. In my directing career, I want to focus on producing new works so I was very excited to see a premiere of a new piece at the National Theatre. I was a bit disappointed with the product that we saw for a variety of reasons that all point to one probable cause, which is that there seemed to be no clear message or direction to the piece. The first indication of this was that my ticket was titled "A New Play," which means that there wasn't a title for the show when our tickets were printed. I also remember the program saying that there was a premiere or reading of the play in November which didn't happen, so perhaps the programs were printed before changes were made.

The play is titled *Grief*, but really it should have been called *Depression*. Grief implies an action in dealing with emotions, whereas dictionary.com defines depression as "discouragement"

or “despondency,” which is a more accurate title for the final product. This play is mislabeled because of the lack of specificity in the goal of the production. The story centers around a widow/mother figure who is very clearly depressed from the beginning of the show, but we never hear her talk about it. The stagnation of her character makes the audien

of this, since it is hard to play the opposite of something if you have not identified what it is. Although I think the characters could have been written as more strong, I don't think that they could have been cast any better. Everyone was very committed to their role and brought something different to the table. Lesley Manville, who played Dorothy, was able to convey such a broad range of raw emotions with just a look on her face. Sam Kelly, cast as her brother Edwin, had such a soft voice and benevolent demeanor that he couldn't help but bring a certain delicacy to his role. Even Victoria (Ruby Bentall) was very strong in characterization. I felt like the cast made up individually unique and interesting components that never quite added up to a larger idea.

I felt that the design of the production also lacked cohesion and a common goal. The



One Man, Two Guvnor(2010)  
Written by Richard Bean  
Adapted from the play by Carlo Goldoni  
Dir. Nicholas Hytner  
Adelphi Theatre

Wednesday, January 11

Boy, was this a fun one! I most certainly needed a show like this after *Grief*, and it really delivered. I have never seen a professional theatre show with so much improvisation and freedom, pantomime included. The level of improv allowed for a very fun atmosphere and an “anything can happen” attitude.

One thing I found particularly interesting about this show was the juxtaposition of the caricature acting style set up through the archetypes in the script with the naturalness of the actors’ “breaking” of character and talking to the audience. I put “breaking” in quotes because they weren’t actually improvising but instead were acting like they were improvising. I was 100% duped on multiple occasions into thinking that certain things were unscripted. In this regard, I think *One Man, Two Guvnors* had the most convincing acting of any show we saw. The actress who played the woman from the audience was incredible. I think that acting the way a non-actor on a stage with hundreds of people watching would naturally react is probably one of the most challenging roles to play convincingly. I felt so bad for her when they sprayed her dress because it didn’t even occur to me that it was a set up. I was also fooled by James Corden’s amazingly convincing reaction to the sandwich man in the audience. I really thought that it had never happened before, even though it happens eight times a week. These tricks brought a feeling of spontaneity and specialness to the show, which can be easily lost after the 200<sup>th</sup> performance. Sometimes I forget that each show is different from all of the others and that’s what makes theatre so great. *Death and the Maiden* also reminded me of this because it seemed that the people who went on different nights had opposing viewpoints. This show, however,



managed to remind me of the uniqueness that theatre provides to each performance through an atmosphere of excitement and freshness.

I thought that the design of the production fit in beautifully with the surreal and colorful humor of the script. The script has a self-awareness in that it recognizes and references the interval, acts, lines, and of course, the audience. I thought that the use of flats to create the set accentuated the script very nicely. This show takes place in the 1960s and has a retro feel to it, so the set is made in a way that was common to the design of sets in the 1960s. In that way, the set

character well. Alan's, who fancies himself an "actor," slapping his chest was perfect because he is so narcissistic that he plays the instrument of himself. I am curious to know if those interludes are written into the script or if they were purely a directorial choice. It's so hard to tell in this show. I really wanted to buy the script just to see how much we saw was planned, since I still cannot tell, but unfortunately I didn't have the money. I have a hunch that Professor Peck has all of the scripts from the trip, so perhaps I will borrow his copy and finally find out how badly I was tricked during the performance.

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

After having seen the funniest play ever written on the previous evening, *One Man, Two Guvnors* continues a remarkable streak of hilarity by delivering another first rate comedy. The play was refreshingly unique and consistently hilarious throughout its two-and-a-half-hour running time. It suffered only for its placement on our class schedule, since seeing it the day after *Noises Off* brings about inevitable comparisons, and although the play was a remarkable triumph, it still comes in second in that particular contest.

Quite apart from the relative merits of each production, *One Man, Two Guvnors* was a very different style of comedy from *Noises Off*, and one which I have scarcely encountered before. The performance incorporated a large degree of audience participation, both genuine and simulated. At first it was thought that something unusual had occurred during the performance we saw, and many of the members of our group were disappointed to learn days later that the audience member had been a plant and the same thing happened in every performance.

Although everything seemed to unfold naturally while I was watching the play, in retrospect I am able to see how events were carefully constructed to trick us into believing this. First, two

genuine audience members were invited on stage unexpectedly, establishing that audience participation would be a part of this show. There was some legitimate irregularity in the performance we viewed at this juncture, when a particularly muscular young man succeeded in lifting James Corden, who played the protagonist. This was actually the only real audience participation in the entire show, but at the time we were expecting for there to be more. Next, a man we all believed to be a true audience member offered James Corden a sandwich during a monologue, and we were led to believe that by interrupting the scene he had significantly interfered with the performance. The main reason that this worked, however, was that James

when Francis attempted to lift his guvnor's luggage before recruiting two men from the audience. Despite the fact that the box obviously weighed practically nothing, James Corden was able to sell struggling to lift it for a solid minute and a half. Because of how completely Corden committed to the gag, it continued to become more hilarious the more it was prolonged, rather

**Matilda: The Musical(2010)**  
**Music by Tim Minchin; Book by Dennis Kelly**  
**Adapted from the book by Roald Dahl**  
**Dir. Matthew Warchus**  
**Cambridge Theatre**

Yes. Yes. Yes. Oh God, yes.

You know what? There is a God. Matilda has shown me the light and proven to me that a higher power exists. Why? Because such good can exist in this world without divine intervention.

Over the past several months, I've been getting more and more excited for the trip to London. I've been getting excited for every single play that we'll be seeing. But I've really been getting excited for just one play in particular, and that play is *Matilda*.

When I try to think about why *Matilda* makes me so happy, the 1996 movie immediately comes to mind. Even though I wasn't able to get through the entire movie until I was about twelve (Pam Ferris as the Trunchbull is pant-wettingly terrifying), I've always loved stories about exceptionally bright children who are able to outsmart the surrounding adults.

I like *Matilda* for the same reason that I like *Book of Mormon* and *Up* and *Metroid Prime*; everything just **works**. The set, special effects, lighting, sound, performances, songs, book, costumes, and anything else that slips my mind all appear on stage as if emerging from the imagination of a small, innocent child. Just take a look at these lyrics from the swing number "When I Grow Up":

When I grow up,  
I will have treats everyday,  
And I'll play with things that Mum pretends  
That mums don't think are fun.

And I will wake up  
When the sun comes up and I  
Will spend all day just lying in the sun.  
And I won't burn cause I'll be all grown up.

Simply put, Tim Minchin (the man behind the music and lyrics) is a virtuoso. Everything from the rambling prose to the boundless optimism screams childhood glee. Of course, I went back to my room after *Matilda* and bought the soundtrack without a moment's hesitation (I'm listening to it as I'm writing this journal entry, if you'd like to know). One of the user reviews for the soundtrack made me worry about the state of humanity a little bit – not for the low score, but for its content. I'll reprint it below.

As amazing as this is, I found it extremely difficult to forget that this story is about child abuse,

This is my favorite musical, period. I hadn't heard any of the music prior to seeing the show, but ever since that night I have had the songs stuck in my head. I am actually listening to the soundtrack as I write this journal because it is so brilliant. *Matilda* combines catchy, complicated rhythmic structures with extremely witty and satirical lyrics. This musical prowess paired with a nostalgic and well-loved childhood story makes for a successful combination.

There's a song for everyone in this show. My personal favorite is "Naughty" because it has managed to put my life story into a catchy melody sung by a ten-year-old. Matilda sings,

example, the theme from “Naughty” is repeated while Ms. Honey is singing during “When I grow up” so the message is applied to another character in addition to Matilda.

The script and score also do a great job of capturing the perspective of a child, which is a large part of Roald Dahl’s whimsy. In this production a fair amount of the cast was comprised of children who played the first graders, but the fifth graders were played by adults, rather than older children. It just seemed to fit so perfectly because when you are so young, you view older



supposed to be a genius, so Demetriou not only had to memorize them but also understand them. Also, let's not forget the monologue in Russian that she delivers near the end! She also has two solo songs and a duet, which are all rhythmically complicated and require a level of finessing and subtlety hard to find in a ten year old.

I guess I'll just say again how floored I was, and still am, by the talented writing, acting, designing, and directing that went into creating this production. I have read some articles online saying that there are talks of the RSC coming to Broadway with the production. If that happens I am going to go see it again with my friend Chandler, who has also avidly been listening to the soundtrack with me. Fingers crossed!

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

After seeing this play, I must say that I now have a new favorite musical. Roald Dahl's children's book *Matilda*

the direction of modern musicals, since many of the recent hits like *Rent* or

amount of change is necessary to make the story work in its new medium. *Matilda the Musical* fortunately, was able to navigate safely between Scylla and Charybdis and arrive at a happy medium. It remained true to the fundamental heart of Dahl's story, faithfully recreating the spirit of the original and focusing heavily on its central theme of anti-intellectualism. However, the play is also not afraid to diverge widely from the novel when needed, and the additions it made did not seem at all out of place in the larger story. One of my favorite additions was the development of Miss Trunchbull's character. Dennis Kelly is able to make her a far less one-dimensional character without actually giving her any redeeming characteristics, which is a neat trick. Instead, she is revealed as a bizarre, neurotic woman, who is nonetheless intensely cruel and makes for a splendid villain. Another addition which worked on a number of levels was Matilda's story of the acrobat and the escapologist, which is eventually revealed to be the story of Miss Honey's past. On one level, Matilda's psychic knowledge of Miss Honey's life story adds another aspect to her mental powers which is particularly useful in the musical, since her telekinesis is downplayed more in the play than other versions of the story due to the great technical difficulty of creating these effects in a stage production. Beyond this, however, I especially like the element this introduces of Matilda as a storyteller, as this is a side to her character which is never explored in the other versions of this story but which makes perfect sense given the other things which we know about her.

*Matilda the Musical* was also an extremely impressive show technically. The set was interestingly executed, with the letter blocks remaining a strong, cohesive visual throughout the play. There were a number of impressive effects, such as the scene in which Miss Trunchbull grabs a girl by her pigtails and threw her up towards the ceiling. By far the most stunning effect, however, is when Matilda uses her telekinetic powers to write a message for Miss Trunchbull on



she is constantly plotting against him to win back her family. Even the idea of a spoiled youngest son who simply sits and whines for attention (a character seen in many fairytales as well) is similar to the spoiled brat that can be found in many common families.

The fact that the play is scripted in fairly plain language also serves to highlight the everyday nature of the royal family. Rather than speaking in 'thee's' and 'thou's,' they speak in



and Raoul stand on the roof under a star-filled sky where there is natural light and no sense of oppression or threatening darkness. Here, Raoul sings lines such as “No more talk of darkness” and “Let me be your light.” He embodies hope for the future and can provide Christine with love and a normal life. In comparison, the Phantom may love Christine, but he cannot show her that except through his music. The Phantom's approach to loving Christine is simply to possess her and essentially force her to love him in return. When the Phantom steals Christine after his opera in the second half, someone tells the Phantom, “You can't make her love you by imprisoning her,” but this is precisely his strategy.

Unexpectedly, I saw connections to *Matilda* in this production. In both, there is a father figure who dies too early, leaving his daughter behind in the hands of sinister forces. Christine's father promised to send her the Angel of Music before his d

Since I was a little kid, for some unexplainable reason, I was obsessed about *Phantom of the Opera* even though my English was not good enough to understand anything. Being able to have this opportunity to watch *Phantom of the Opera* in Her Majesty's Theatre was an honor. Upon



just in the first half of the production. Even with so many set changes, the play did not seem discontinuous in any way. Every transition was done in a quick and smooth fashion, especially the first transition from the old abandoned theatre to the glamorous luxurious theatre, revealing the golden framework. Another notable transition was the part where the Phantom took Christine into his dungeon. As the Phantom was dragging Christine by her hand onto a bridge, fog started to cover the stage and candles emerged. As soon as the Phantom and Christine disappeared at the end of the bridge, the boat came into sight through the foggy stage. Each shift between sets was handled in such a dedicated manner that it created the special relation of the two different sets.

The effect of the chandelier was slightly disappointing for me. The first part when the chandelier was pulled up to the ceiling added so much for the transition into the glorious theatre, yet the part where it fell was not so impressive. However, I attributed this disappointment to myself. Because of my high expectation in this production, I was hoping for something that was merely impossible for a theatre production to accomplish.

Overall, I finally understand why *Phantom of the Opera* is able to run for a full 25 years in Her Majesty's Theatre, and I am glad that our Theatre in England course gave me the opportunity to see this production.

– Li-Ya Sun (Class of 2012; Psychology)

Comedy of Errors(1589?)

also another Shakespearean play I was not overly familiar with, and although I did not adore this production quite as much as *Measure for Measure*, it was still a rewarding evening of theatre bursting with energy and creativity. This was a nice play on which to end our Shakespearean adventures, since to end on an inferior production would have been wholly depressing.

Although this play benefited from imaginative staging throughout its duration, perhaps the most memorable were the first five minutes in which the tenement-like set split violently down the middle to represent a shipwreck. This was a breathtaking effect and set a high watermark for the staging to come. Another highlight was during a chase scene in the middle of the play during which a car is driven on stage. This is something which everyone involved in theatre has contemplated doing at some point in their lives, and it was nice to see the dream fulfilled at the Olivier Theatre. But the car itself was only on stage for about twenty seconds and actually contributed nothing to the play. It was almost as if it had been included merely to show off the fact that it could be done. This sort of playfulness permeated the entire production. This was, after all, a production which felt entirely comfortable including the most gratuitous instance of onstage flatulence I have ever witnessed; it was certainly not a production which was concerned with remaining highbrow. Instead, the energy of the production was decidedly chaotic, seeming to take delight in constantly subverting our expectations for what a British production of a Shakespeare play in a moa[ot ervie.l8kes81ludt-2(t)oonse.l8t8(co)-4(no)-4(nanr)-1(t)-6icti8vea[(

captured the vibrancy and variety of the script commendably. Much of this was down to the strength of the cast, which gave a remarkably energetic performance. A number of the actors in this production were able to achieve beautiful interpretations which exposed new sides to their characters not apparent in the text. One example was the way in which Adriana and Luciana were handled. They were depicted as bleached-blond valley girls, an effective way to modernize these characters, and this resulted in some extremely funny scenes. Both sets of twins were also outstanding, bringing a marvelous sense for comedy to their performances which kept the laughs coming steadily as the production unfolded. Although the plot is somewhat superficial compared to Shakespeare's later works, occupied with the farcical mainstays of mistaken identity and slapstick rather than delving more deeply into the characters themselves, in the hands of such a beguiling performance it is very easy for us to ignore this fact and allow ourselves to be en

The play was set in a modern city. The script turns convention upside down by having the mischief happen in an urban setting instead of out in nature, where Shakespeare usually sets these stories. The design emphasized the difference with four-story-tall buildings that move and rotate through the stage. As I mentioned in my journal for *13*, the Olivier Theatre was built to show off its technical prowess, and this production was no different. At one point, they brought an ambulance onstage for about ten seconds basically just because they could. This play could have, and has in the past, been done very well with minimal set. Basically, all you need are three doors. I thought that the bulging set worked, though, because it made the setting another character in the play. There were always a bunch of extras on the set to create the bustling, living environment that is a city.

This production was also surprising because of the type of casting involved. There were strong Latino and Caribbean cultural influences to the production which I thought infused the urban city setting with an exotic, nature-inspired energy. The use of a band helped reinforce this aura, and the song choices helped keep it accessible to a young audience. The band sang in

beating his servant for never delivering it. They did a very good job of finding two sets of actors who look very similar to each other; in fact I had trouble telling them apart at bows. The physical likeness of the actors helped the audience suspend their disbelief and go along with the farcical plot of errors confusing them. I thought that the difference in accents between the brothers helped give the audience a clue about who was who while maintaining the visual gag. You'd think that a wife would recognize that her husband has a different accent, but I thought that the choice gave more to the audience than it took away from the story. Since the play is about visual mistakes and doors opening and closing, I thought that an auditory difference in character was a clever way to help out the audience without impeding on the original story.

The interval scene was a great way to gear this production towards a younger audience. The Olivier was suddenly turned into the front corner of a dance club, blasting beats with hookers and a dancing man loitering about. There was a lot going on in this scene, so it becomes part of the story without adding new words to Shakespeare. It definitely pushed the urban feeling and the constant bustle that goes along with it. In one window there was a dominatrix whipping a man, and when she was finished she sat down and knitted. I keep mentioning all of these extras, but what I haven't said is how detailed they all were. Simply having bodies onstage does not give life to the story, and this director left no actor out of the detailing process. Overall I would say that the play was very well directed. The director had a clear vision to work towards and he followed through with it in every detail, giving it a breath of life and energy that is hard to attain, especially with Shakespeare.

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)

Haunted Child(2011)  
Written by Joe Penhall  
Dir. Jeremy Herrin  
Royal Court Theatre Downstairs

Friday, January 13

The title gives a misleading impression of the play, as I entered imagining a horror story with possessed children or murderous fathers. While these tropes were not explored by the play, the title still proved to have a deeper relevance that quickly became clear. Each of the three characters could in turn be viewed as the eponymous child, searching for an absent father figure.

The play centers on Thomas, a young boy, and his mother Julie upon discovering the return of his father Douglas, who has camped out in the attic and is missing teeth after an unexplained month-long disappearance. Douglas reveals that during his absence he has experienced a spiritual awakening. After losing his teeth in a barroom brawl, he was taken into a cult. Once inside, alienation from the outside world and a series of philosophical lectures are used to indoctrinate Douglas, a former engineer, into the cult.

Douglas cannot accept that he has thrown months of his life away on a sham organization. He is a smart and educated man, so he would *never* have invested so much time into something so foolish. He rationalizes that the organization consists of other “like-minded people”: engineers, scientists, students. He promotes the group’s indoctrination

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Dog” suggests a significantly more modern aesthetic, befitting a show first performed in 1980), but, when appropriate, the music effectively conveys sheer energy and revolutionary spirit (in “Red and Black” and in “Do You Hear the People Sing?”). The score creates and employs motifs to a fault, so that Fantine and Eponine both sing the melody from “On My Own” at various moments in the score, connecting the characters as two women who Die before their time (Fantine from consumption, Eponine from a gunshot fired around the time of the 1832 Paris Uprising). The “Master of the House” theme used in the first act characterizes the Thénardiens as persuasive, humorous, and cunning conmen, and it returns after the uprising ends in “Beggars at the Feast” to reassure the audience that life for the characters has resumed a kind of normality.

The show is based on Victor Hugo’s identically titled novel from 1862, and this helps explain why the musical’s story becomes (in my opinion) a little unwieldy. The show doesn’t have a “book” in the traditional sense, since everything is sung-through. It begins with two separate prologues in an attempt to explain the lives of the parent generation (including protagonist Jean Valjean and Fantine, Cosette’s mother) and Cosette’s childhood. Fifteen songs later, (out of a total twenty-



adaptation of the novel, directed by Billie August, which effectively condenses the novel's plot  
into

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expectations. Some aspects were disappointing, but others met and even exceeded my



re-enacting the bishop's mercy – frees Javert. Shocked, Javert reconsiders the rules on which he has built his life; he has always acted according to the letter of the law, and never once considered sparing someone out of compassion. He was prepared to Die within this neat system he'd set up in his head. But Valjean, by acting against the law and, moreover, with no thought for his own benefit, befuddles Javert. Unlike Valjean, he cannot see an alternative way of living; his pride as a lawman will not allow him to exist in the "debt of the thief." Thus, Valjean's act causes such a rift in Javert's self-conception that he annihilates himself, committing suicide, rather than sacrificing his integrity to re-conceptualize his identity and values. Boubil and Schönberg brought Valjean's and Javert's parallel moments of identity crisis into sharp focus by reprising the melody of Valjean's iconic "What Have I Done?" into "Javert's Suicide." For ease of comparison, I reproduce the two songs side-by-side:

**Valjean:** What have I done?  
Sweet Jesus, what have I done?  
Become a thief in the night,  
Become a dog on the run  
And have I fallen so far,  
And is the hour so late  
That nothing remains but the cry of my hate,  
The cries in the dark that nobody hears,  
Here where I stand at the turning of the years?

If there's another way to go  
I missed it twenty long years ago.  
My life was a war that could never be won.  
They gave me a number and murdered Valjean  
When they chained me and left me for dead  
Just for stealing a mouthful of bread.

Yet why did I allow that man

**Javert:** Who is this man?  
What sort of devil is he  
To have me caught in a trap  
And choose to let me go free?  
It was his hour at last  
to put a seal on my fate,  
wipe out the past & wash me clean off the slate!  
All it would take was a flick of his knife.  
Vengeance was his yet he gave me back my life!

Damned if I'll live in the debt of a thief!  
Damned if I'll yield at the end of the chase.  
I am the Law and the Law is not mocked.  
I'll spit his pity right back in his face.  
There is nothing on earth that we share.  
It is either Valjean or Javert!

Take an eye for an eye!  
Turn your heart into stone!  
This is all I have lived for!  
This is all I have known!

One word from him and I'd be back  
Beneath the lash, upon the rack.  
Instead he offers me my freedom  
I feel my shame inside me like a knife.  
He told me that I have a soul.

And my thoughts fly apart  
Can this man be believed?  
Shall his sins be forgiven?  
Shall his crimes be reprieved?

And must I now begin to doubt,  
Who never doubted all these years?  
My heart is stone and still it trembles  
The world I have known is lost in shadow.  
Is he from heaven or from hell?

self around being the opposite of the criminal Valjean and now cannot conceive that they might both share desirable qualities.

The third stanza, for me, is the most telling. It shows both men reacting to an act of mercy. Musically, it demonstrates this shift in thought by slowing down from the frenzied recitative and its melody is softened with the addition of legato strings; we also hear a modulation into a major key, indicating a more contemplative and productive mode of thought. Valjean thinks in spiritual terms – seeing the bishop’s gift as a kindness, one that “teach[es] me love.” He sees the potential for brotherhood and equality in the bishop’s act. Javert, on the other hand, sees Valjean’s mercy as a chaotic inversion of the correct order. Valjean’s act is not a kindness that has the potential bring two men into brotherhood, but rather a power play, which puts Valjean into a position of “dominion.” Javert speaks in legalese, insisting on his “rights” and unable to conceive of a world in which an individual might act without recourse to the law. Javert understands how to treat upstanding citizens who follow the law and criminals who act against the law, but someone who acts without reference to any law at all absolutely baffles him. For him, a world that allows such a topsy-turvy hierarchy is a “hell” that is “lost in shadow.” The concurrent flood of tremolo strings and trilling woodwinds in the orchestration – with their rapid fluttering switching between pitches – echo Javert’s unease in a suddenly unstable world. Most tellingly, this unstable realm is described as “the world of Jean Valjean,” which Javert cannot imagine existing in. Where Valjean thought of the bishop as a guardian “spirit” who has come to “move his life,” Javert can only characterize Valjean as a “devil.” Javert’s mention in the last stanza of “black and cold” stars is an allusion to his earlier solo, entitled “Stars,” in which he praises the stars as symbols of “order and light” which always “hold [their] course and [their]





The identical structure of these two songs highlights just how differently the two enemies' minds function, and illustrates *Les Misérables*'s brilliant use of musical leitmotifs. This is by no means the only instance in which a recognizable melody is reworked for different









over-emphasize certain realistic characteristics of drunkenness, such as stumbling or double-vision.

I'm going to end this last journal by saying that this entire trip has been a life-changing experience. The knowledge I have gained and growth I have achieved as a person just from leaving Rochester is priceless. Every show we saw was a highly valuable experience, even if I bash it in the journals. Each production was an opportunity to train my critical lens and sharpen my directorial eye, and I would like to think that I took full advantage of all of them. I can't even fathom how many students that you, Professor Peck, have helped as you have helped me, but I also do not doubt that the volume makes it any less special for you, which is why you continue to be an inspiration to us all year after year. I hope you realize how personally responsible you are for cultivating the special and valuable theatre program that students like me get to experience at this university. It's been an honor to work with you, and I hope to stay in touch after graduation.

Thank you for everything you do,

– Jessica Chinelli (Class of 2012; English: Theater)