

We entered Trafalgar Studios and walked down the carpeted stairway and onto the stage. The house, the audience was at our backs. How fantastic. We had become part of the performance; our importance as audience members was cemented as soon as we entered the theatre. Trafalgar Studios has been by far my favorite theatre space thus far and we're two days in as I write this.

A Daughter's A Daughter was, apparently, one of three plays that Agatha Christie wrote under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. Having built a career from mystery novels and mystery plays, she was able to create something entirely different under this new name. This production was incredibly well acted, especially by the two leading women, the mother, Anne, and the daughter, Sarah, whose relationship tragically degenerates as they spend years living together, resentful of the other for spoiling her chances at happiness. From the first scene, when the mother and daughter are reunited after a long war that left a lasting mark on the face of Britain, to the final scene when each admits their hatred and resentment of the other, the transformation of each woman is immensely tragic and overwhelmingly apparent. (And clearly exhausting to the actresses who looked totally beat during the curtain call.) In a way, when Sarah returns home after the war, she enters a new one when she comes into her mother's house and destroys her mother's possibility of

seemed to me that I had met them all before. I felt that I myself had been in rehearsals with these very characters; I felt that I had worked with these actors, that stage manager, and that very playwright. The play (about a play about W.H. Auden and Ben Britton) is not about Britton and Auden other than that they were both artists who dealt with feelings and ideas of art in the same way the actors, the writer and the stage manager do. The company of actors and technicians

Twelfth Night

I directed *Twelfth Night* at my high school at the end of my junior year. This was a time before I could think, I always say. Being a real, critical thinker started happening later. There was much that I misinterpreted as an amateur director that became beautifully clear in witnessing this production. I set my production on an island off the coast of New England in a Gatsby-esque 1920s where women wore their hair short, so it may have been easier to confuse a brother and sister for each other. In retrospect, it seems that I created a solution to the biggest problem I had with the script, and then directed an entire production around that single solution. Not the best idea. This production, however, was marvelous.

One thing I love about modern productions of Shakespeare is that they can be set anywhere – Elizabethan England, Gatsby's

a secret, or a fear and then finally being released from whatever it was that was so filling. It is largely a character-driven narrative complete with a world of both upper class royal types of characters, and of lowly servants and bumbling fools. A few characters exist between these two worlds. Viola, namely, is herself of royal blood but is disguised as a servant going between royals and through the lowlier characters (who actually include a couple of knights, oddly enough.) Another character who, like most fools, exists between worlds and never fits nicely into just one setting, is Feste. Both characters exist on the periphery of worlds in *Twelfth Night*.

Perhaps most hilariously smart (in acting, not in character) was Sir Andrew Aguecheek; an entirely incompetent knight and suitor to Olivia who nearly stole the show out from under its leading women

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Duke of York's Theatre

Goofing around online, I found a trailer advertising the moving of the New York

final speech in French, Lear crying to the storm, Hamlet with a skull in hand – I adored this part of the performance and was left feeling kind of incomplete. I came out of that wishing we could have seen those guys do *Lear* – they were fantastic actors. Even though I came away longing for Shakespeare, I did feel that the spirit of his theatre was alive in the Globe that day, and being part of such a truly English tradition was an incredible theatrical and personal experience.

Billy Elliot

For me, the defining moment in *Billy Elliot* is at the end when he finally makes it to his audition in London. He is about to leave after his interview when a faceless voice asks him, "Billy, what does it feel like when you dance?" It's been a theme of the entire trip thus far, especially in the work of Lee Hall, but it's one that can't be written about enough. What does art make us feel? When a painter paints or when an individual looks at a painting, when a dancer dances or when an audience watches a little boy dance his heart out, what does it feel like? It's an interesting question and one that I've never really known how to answer, simply because I'm feeling a whole lot.

When Billy dances, it feels like "Electricity." When I act, it feels like my heart gets bigger – that's the best way to describe it. It feels warm in my chest area. It's the same when I see a good piece of theatre, when I am part of experiencing acting even when I'm not the one doing it necessarily, when I get to watch it and respond to it, it feels warm, like a blessing.

Back to the play. The choreography in *Billy Elliot* is stunning and some of the best, most innovative choreography on any stage right now. Movement is vital in art – not just in the theatre, but in music and literature – art is about movement. And *Billy Elliot*, though this play is literally about movement, is about a boy who loves to dance. Movement takes on other key roles within this story and is alluded to within the breathtaking choreography. The passage of time is beautifully illustrated in the grandmother's song as the men move across the stage with chairs, the changing political atmosphere is illustrated explicitly in the Maggie Thatcher song, but also more subtly at the end, when the miners go back to work, down the mine shaft, from honorable solidarity to defeated shame and hopelessness. The play deals with a number of political and social issues that are still relevant within modern society; though the play takes place over twenty years ago, it does not feel dated or irrelevant. But through the social commentary, this play is about the way art makes us feel. It is a play about a boy who loves to dance, who is moved – literally and figuratively – by the spirit of art.

The Pitmen Painters

Aside from *War Horse*, *The Pitmen Painters* has been my favorite play we've seen so far. Looking back on my notes from the show, I laugh because it seems I barely took any. I jotted down a line or two that I felt really hit at something or got at me in some way, but I was so engrossed in the story, in the world of the pitmen that I couldn't be bothered to pay

There's a moment in the end of the play when Lyon is sketching Oliver. And they get into a fight that sort of begins when Oliver tells Lyon that there is no life in the drawing. Lyon yells at Oliver, who seems to have given up art in a way, and says, "Don't be afraid of the world; meet it. Don't be afraid to create something new." This is a play about freshness, about looking at things with fresh eyes and finding the will to see beauty and art in them. It is about discovering a will to create, a habit of art, and never letting it go, no matter where you come from. It is, like *Billy Elliot*, a play about the way art makes us feel.

Annie Get Your Gun

to believe that she's supposed to be played *that* stupidly. I also won't buy the argument that it's children's theatre and it needs to be that way. No. Children are not stupid. They would understand just fine if Annie was smart and sassy like she's supposed to be.

Production aside, I have some obvious problems with the script. I love Irving Berlin as much as the next guy, but oh my gosh, could you be any more sexist, Mr. Berlin? What was the moral of the story exactly? Don't have more success than the man you're in love with because no one gets married if they're better at something than a guy? And this is what we're showing our kids still? Today? I just hope every mom took their daughter home and said, "You know it's just a play, right? It doesn't really mean that you should do that." But as we've been learning over the past few days, plays mean a whole lot. They are tremendously powerful in conveying social and political ideas, especially to young people. Art is a tool for education and it can be used for good or for evil. (Maybe evil is a strong word, but shouldn't young girls today be watching plays that tell them to be the best they can be, not that they should hold back from their full potential in order to get themselves a ring?)

The Priory

At the end of the first act of the *The Priory*, I looked around at my friends and colleagues and said something like "Oh my god, TOOP has to do this show, it's amazing. And I'm playing Laura." But then I thought, "No, I want to play Kate. No, I'll be Rebecca." It was so hard to pick a character (as if that's how it works in theatre) – they're all so rich, so

worked. (SPOILER ALERT: do not read further if you want the magical illusion of this piece of theatre to remain in tact.) And this is what she said: Beneath the bum role in her dress is an Evian bottle filled with blood. It has a motor inside it which is charged by a battery. A tube goes from the bottle up her back and down her arm and then is covered by flesh-

Nation

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In class, we discussed a number of the criticisms that *Nation* has faced thus far, namely, that it fails to make sense to an audience who hasn't read the book on which it is based and that it is incredibly fast-paced and hard to follow. While I wouldn't disagree with these claims, I think that *Nation* had a great deal of strength conceptually and in its production value. The lighting was phenomenal and it was well acted all around. The set was gorgeous and the 3D projection was really cool and different. Conceptually, the idea of the story – part creation myth, part love story with a tragic ending, and part philosophical debate about the relationship between faith and science – was incredibly stimulating. The combination of intellectual material with the music, the lights, the dancing, the set, the colors of the island makes the show appealing to both adults and children.

There is something very attractive to me about island mythology. One of my favorite musicals is *Once on this Island*, a myth about a young peasant girl on an island in the Antilles who falls in love with a wealthy, light-skinned aristocrat boy. They are unable to be together and she dies of a broken heart, but the gods turn her into a tree to watch over the people of the island and her spirit sets them all free to love. There was a quality of that story which exists in *Nation*, I think. These are island myths, or just plain myths I suppose, in which Love, along with elements of earth, water, wind and fire are all their own characters. In *Nation*, for example, the sea seemed to have a life of its own. So did the earth. And so did the power of love. All of these very abstract ideas, have concrete roles in myth. They help to sway the fate of the humans. In this production, this notion was heavily

aided by clever staging. The actors would rock back and forth on a ship during a storm, becoming the water in which Mau was swimming. Physical changes occurred in the actors when the element that they were tackling shifted. In this way, these elements took on their own role within the production and it was incredibly effective.

Pains of Youth

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The most striking part of *Pains of Youth* were the transitions between scenes in which modern, elite, business-y, members of a futuristic bourgeoisie enter from opposite ends of the stage and a cold, clinical fluorescent darkness washes over the stage. They move set pieces, putting props in plastic bags as if cleaning up after a murder, and bring pieces on stage, putting them in the hands of actors, lighting their cigarettes for them. It was as if the bourgeois elite were cleaning up after and controlling the (dare I say) pseudo-intellectual medical students living on the fringe of Bohemia but never quite committing to its lifestyle. I loved the transitions. I found them jarring and painful – like a bad car accident. They weren't pretty but I was so fascinated by the movement, the choreography of it all, I couldn't look away.

The actual narrative was incredibly difficult for me to follow. It was directed to be very fast-paced, I think, and so I was unable to follow everything that was going on. I do think it was probably written intentionally as ambiguous or chaotic, since the structure was a string of short scenes artfully tied together by transitions. The other problem I had with the play, which I'm also fairly certain was intentional, was that I didn't particularly like any of the characters. At the beginning, I thought that Marie would be a good, strong, likeable character but by the end, she seemed just as irrational and angsty as everyone else. The only character who I really, truly liked was Alt. And I think it's because he was the only character to show any kind of selfless compassion towards another. Everyone else was remarkably self-serving and seemed most content wallowing in self-pity, feeling so sorry

for their tortured and confused love-lives. If they took a minute to step back and realize how lucky they were they might have been quite happy. Marie, a woman doctor in that time period, falls apart because her boyfriend breaks up with her, and falls into a pit of depression so devastating that she will probably never be able to return? It's just ridiculous. During the whole play she can't seem to think of anything but herself, even her love for Dizzy seems to be simply a mask for concern over her own desires and fears. Al, however refused to be pulled into the pit of selfish self-loathing into which the rest of the characters seemed to have fallen. He was nice, simply. And I wished that he had been a bigger part of the story and not, as it seemed, almost a mechanism for normalcy in a chaotic and crazed community of pained youths.

Oliver

As I said to Ruth after the performance, *Oliver* wasn't giving us 100%. But the production value of this show is astounding. Given the sets moving all around, the bridge coming out of the ground, the haze, the lights, the costumes, the fly system (which must be insane), the production in the Drury Lane Theatre is an experience in and of itself. I don't think it even matters so much what show you're watching. The theatrics of it all are enough.

I said this in class and was practically booed from the room, but it's how I feel so I'll go ahead and say it again: I just don't like *Oliver*. I don't find the music particularly compelling, and the story feels too irrelevant to tug at my heartstrings. I'm sorry! But it's

An Inspector Calls

Wyndham's Theatre

This was a phenomenal production. Firstly, I love that this show was once something that was performed at every high school all over America and the UK and became tired and washed up, but has now been transformed into something very special, something honest and moving with intellectual and moral quality. It is a story that puts its faith in the power of youth – unlike *Pains of Youth*, which seems to diminish any belief that we young people may be able to change the world and turns us into a culture of self-obsessed pseudo-intellectuals. This story, quite literally, calls for two young people to carry the emotional and moral heart of the show. Sheila and Eric are the two characters, other than the inspector, who feel, innately, an astonishingly inspiring degree of social responsibility in the face of their family whose values of privatization and self-promotion threaten to corrupt their goodness. And in this case, actors whose honest

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morning in class!) was very, very cool. But what was even more amazing was the role it served as the actors interacted with its broken pieces, as Jerald, the mother and the father climb back into it as it rights itself. It's like a mask of their former life, of life before the inspector called, or life before the First World War, when private interest ruled the social, political and economic norms of life. But it can't be like that any more and the characters who understand this, Eric and Sheila, remain outside, in 1945, in the future, and those who cannot, who will fight against the tide of change, go inside and try to deal with a broken version of how they used to live.

The ending speech from the inspector, directed out towards the audience, is quite literally, a speech. He speaks to the audience more than he does to the family. The world is changing, he explains, it is too fragile to only look out for ourselves. The only way to create a strong tomorrow is to care for the welfare of others. When this play was written, Britain was changing; it was becoming a nationalized, liberal welfare state. And this play seems to serve as a plea for the British to believe in it, to have faith in the welfare state, to believe that only in helping each other, in a philosophy of liberal equity, can Britain pick itself up from the devastation of WWII and rebuild itself. (Of course that all went to hell when Maggie Thatcher decided that privatization was the superior political philosophy, but we've already seen a number of other plays about that.)

I felt that the acting was really inspired. There wasn't a weak actor in the bunch. The children were wonderful, the inspector was very good, the mother was hilariously tragic, the father was excellently pompous, Sheila was just beautifully honest, as were Jerald and

Greta Garbo Came to Donegal

Greta is about a down-and-out Irish family working at as cooks, housekeepers, and chauffeurs at a mansion that they used to own. For some ambiguous reason, through some poor business decisions or something similar, the family lost the house along with the family business. The gay English artist who bought the house from the family has hired them all as his help, along with his young English lover, who works as his gardener. The story begins when the very likeable English boss announces that his good friend, the fabulously famous actress of years past, Greta Garbo will be visiting their house in the Irish countryside as part of a European vacation for a couple of days.

The plot unfolds as the relationships between the characters, of both the romantic and platonic variety, come to life. The play, as far as I can tell (and I certainly couldn't tell everything) was an exploration of the way relationships function, the way they are able to survive in the face of so many complex challenges, the way they start and how they grow and the way in which they so often fail. In the background and betwixt the intermingling of these different relationships is the subtle existence of the local peacock whose fiercely unsettling call echoes through the scenes, startling the audience. It is a beautiful, lone creature whose call doesn't match its appearance. Similarly the relationships that make up this story are each ultimately composed of two lone individuals, two solitary peacocks each crying out something horrible to their partner – the other can't seem to hear or understand the meaning. It's a kind of tragedy. Eternity spent with someone who can't understand your cry for help. This idea, I think, intentionally echoes something Garbo herself once

said, that she is a solitary man orbiting the earth and just hasn't decided where it is she wants to land. This idea is passed from Garbo on to the youngest character, Paulie's niece, who is struggling to find a way to put herself through medical school. This young woman is the only character, perhaps besides Garbo and Paulie, who isn't tied to a futile and lonely relationship from which she can never escape – except perhaps to Donegal, from which it is apparently very difficult to leave. But in a rather morally or politically confusing conclusion, the girl who has said she will refuse help from anyone, ends up taking money from Garbo to help fund her education in Dublin. I don't know quite what to make of this ending– I don't know why I'm supposed to believe in the rightness of taking handouts etc, but I liked it, I think. I liked that the girl got to go to med school and live her dream. I guess I'm just happy with happy endings even when they seem to come out of nowhere and have a hollow, tragic quality about them. There are so many more layers to this plot than what I have discussed here, but there was so much to process I simply chose to pull the ideas which stand out most in my memory – that apparently being the role of 'the relationship' and the saga of the young woman.

It was an incredibly neat experience, being a part of history like that, seeing the world premiere of a Frank Guinness play. And the Tricycle was a very cool space and seemed to attract a really tightly knit, very cool community of theatergoers; when we went to pick up tickets, literally everyone in line knew each other. I feel very lucky to have been a part of such an historic night.

with Ken the relationship of the viewer to the art. I don't remember the exact dialogue, but the gist was this. The painting isn't really anything without the individual who goes to experience it. The act of looking into the heart of the picture, feeling the experience of art is vital to the movement, the aesthetic beauty, the feeling of the painting itself. In a seminar I was in this very morning, we were discussing Picasso's *The Three Musicians* and I recalled Rothko and *Red* and said that I thought it was like a puzzle and sense can't be made out of it without those who view it. Without appreciators of art, art is nothing. It's like theatre; without an audience, a performance is nothing. To try to understand, to try to make sense, the journey of feeling the story of art is the point of modernist art. Even if we fail to complete the puzzle, the point is to try.

This is, I think, what Rothko believed and I think that it's part of the mysterious reason behind why he pulled out of the contract with Philip Johnson and the Seagram Corporation. He says in the play that he will not allow the people who dine in *that* restaurant to look at his art. It may have partially been his elitist attitude, but I also think that because he believed so strongly that the people who view his picture are participating in the artistic process because they are the ones who bring art to life, and he didn't want the people who eat in the Four Seasons to experience his art.

Stories about art, like *Red* and the *Pitmen Painters*, capture my heart. I think I know why, too. Both of these plays brought up the idea of the importance of creating something new – “don't be afraid to create something new,” both Rothko and Lyons say at the end of each play. The message of these plays is often that art, creating, being part of something artistic, makes us feel something very raw and incredibly meaningful. I feel that when I act. And I also feel it when I go to museums and I get really close to a painting so that I can see

the painter's brush strokes. It's such an out of body experience, art. Van Gogh makes me feel one thing and Rothko another, but all of these feelings are so raw, so real because I do have this sense, which Rothko talked about in *Red*, that in viewing these paintings, I have made them come to life, I have breathed movement into them and set them free.

The Misanthrope

I was lucky enough to get the opportunity to see *The Misanthrope* at the Comedy Theatre at the end of our stay in London. I think that Kiera Knightley is very bad in films that I've seen in America. In general, I find her to be a pretty terrible actress. And I wanted to see *The Misanthrope* in part because I wanted for my opinion to finally be justified or to

Regardless, when I sat down to write this journal, all I could think of was Kiera Knightley. Knightley's role doesn't call for a whole lot that she can't easily give – she plays a famous actress whose primary struggle involves overcoming the crippling self-doubt and low self-esteem characteristic of those who act and those who gain fame through it. That said, she did a convincing enough job. I saw the play after we had discussed it in class so I didn't know what people were talking about when they said Knightley couldn't handle the syntax of the script, that she couldn't handle the verse and that the couplets came out too sing-songy while the other actors managed to make it all sound very modern. But when I saw it, I understood what my classmates meant. Verse, and rhyme especially, are difficult to handle. I agree that she struggled with making the language sound natural, but her American accent and general attitude and energy were very genuine and believable. In the final moment of the play, when Alceste, the only person she actually cares about, leaves her alone with all of these wretched people with whom she surrounds herself, there was a

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original context. I very much enjoyed the play and thought it was well-acted for the most part, intelligently directed and designed, shrewdly written and fun to watch.

Six Degrees of Separation

I couldn't have picked a more phenomenal show to be the final one I had the pleasure of experiencing in London. My first impression is that this theatre space is very interesting. It's a completely oval space, so you can tell that the purpose of going to the theatre when it was built was to be seen, not necessarily to allow enjoyment of art in the way that we now go to the theatre for. The director or design team (or both, most likely) thought o

the ovular room separate and move around the stage, creating different dream-like atmospheres. The most bizarre thing is, though, that I never even noticed them move, I only ever noticed them once they were in new places and thought to myself, "how'd they get over there?" Maybe I was too preoccupied with the acting to notice the set moving. But it was one of the coolest parts of the production and its subtle glow was quite beautiful.

I have never read this play, but John Guare also wrote *House of Blue Leaves*, which is one of my favorite plays, so I had a feeling that I would enjoy it immensely. I was right. Not only were the technical aspects of the show breathtaking, but we were also lucky enough to be privy to, in my opinion, arguably the best performance of the trip. The woman who played Ouisa was remarkable. I mean, I didn't even think she was acting; I just believed her. I believed in her love and her happiness and her longing to accept this kid and help him and the tension with her daughter and the reality of her marriage. It was all so real. That is something so rarely achieved, even in the best theatres in the world, that kind of honesty. She had an honesty so deep that it's hard to believe we aren't watching a real person tell the story of what has happened to her. She was truly remarkable. And so were the other actors, although she outshined them all. The man who played the husband, Anthony Head, was also very good – their relationship in general was superbly honest and movingly real. The man who played Paul at all stages of his life, and Sydney Poitier at one point, was amazing as well.

One of the things that made the experience of this play unique was that the actors all really seemed to be on the same level, to be experiencing things together, making choices as a team, and as an audience member who also loves to act, I love seeing casts who all but breathe in unison. The show was also very raw. We saw the production's second

performance, I believe, so it was really interesting to see these actors at the very beginning of a huge run, before they become tired of their roles and stop giving their whole heart to the performance. (Such a thing should never happen in professional theatre but unfortunately, it does.) It was also a treat to get to see a team of British actors successfully convey a story that is so intensely American, so deep within American culture and tradition