Kelsey Burritt
ENG 248: Theatre in England

, Wednesday December 29th

I distinctly remember being impressed with the scope of the New London Theatre upon walking in to find my seat. It was remarkably open, and the huge performing space sort of incorporated itself into the audience space. The mammoth suspended set-piece ripped through the blackness of the theatre, and I first took it for the face of a cliff rather than a representation of a torn-out piece of paper, which it ended up being. In some ways,

's first impressions followed through in the performance. It is a play that relies in part on its epic scale, and beyond Major Nichols' journal's purpose as plot device to provide the audience with a setting, the "backdrop" (for lack of a better word) also introduces the viewer to the ripping and tearing I found prevalent in the action of the play. The rip-roaring of Joey as a colt into Albert's life, how it se (e) 0.2u 0. 0. (-) Tj so f rriol0.2 (r (ng, t)

perhaps fatal trap of following in your parents footsteps, or maybe it speaks to the indifferent hand of fate that Billy should die while the rebellious Albert should live and be reunited with Joey. Branching off of this, there was also an ongoing theme of reciprocity between both human and animal characters alike. The animals actually played

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I'm afraid I must start out this entry with a bit of bias, and say that I was not the most avid aficionado of this play, although the production value was spectacular. I feel, as many discussed, it is mostly due to the characters

not only in his humanity, but his gift of his dead brother's Star of David to Wraysford; it's significant that such a strongly symbolic token of faith should be placed in Wraysford's hands by the conclusion of the play. I think not only redeeming but forgiving—Isabelle, for example, and himself—is pertinent to the resolution.

Wraysford's ending monologue about the inability to "capture in words" the events that had transpired really struck me. To me it seemed that's what the whole show was attempting to do—capture words in letters or spoken dialogue or penned in a diary. It was particularly effective because of how upsetting it is to Wraysford, and perhaps in a metatheatrical sense how upsetting it is to the actor, that he cannot express what they went through, despite best efforts and jarring results as it is. It seemed a troubling reminder of the struggle of the theatre itself, and the ever

, Thursday December 30th

Thinking on , my mind jumps immediately to two places: memory and the American Dream. In some ways, the two central ideas of the play have a good deal in common. Both are sort of elusive, ambiguous concepts; both offer themselves to the imagery of glass (reflective and breakable). Even in their relation to each other, specifically looking at this as a modern production and why it seems timely now, the American Dream sort of relies on our memory, in both the audience's job to evoke their knowledge of it and the cynical retrospect Tom gives it in his carefully crafted expression. I also must remember the importance of Tom's creative control of the play; it's not an objective narrative, but a biased, purposeful voice that drives it onward. Tom's prologue, the open explanation of the play as an expressionistic piece of memory-art, and his corresponding epilogue seem to tie up the whole thing in a bow, and he is the first to admit things have been glossed over and tweaked. Memory, after all, is not so much a data-like record as it is an impression of a mood, which the play achieves with the music (both the two musicians and the victrola), the lighting (the artificial and the candle-light), and the fixed obsessions with escapism (the menagerie, museums, the movies). I think even the use of slightly unorthodox curtains hints at the illusion at work in Tom's memory-play. There is a red velvet curtain, but it only raises a short way to the ceiling, and instead of parting it raises from the ground, usually when characters (such as the first, frozen tableau of Amanda and Laura) seem to magically appear onstage. The other instance was in the scene between Jim and Laura, when a thin white curtain is drawn through the stage and the space of the house. Perhaps this signals the audience to the complete contrivance of the scene, shows that Tom could not know what happened

between them as he was not there, and so invents this theatrical moment of candlelight, dancing, and a refreshing transparency of thought.

Referring back to the first appearance of Amanda and Laura onstage, as if frozen in time, I now wonder if this is another example of tableau that adds to the museum-like quality of the show. Just as Laura obsesses over her symbolic little glass menagerie, so Tom arranges his play, polishes and orchestrates it to make a cohesive, glimmering whole. The play, like the museums Laura would visit when skipping class, is a place of collected moments in time, set up to evoke a certain reaction. In some ways the American Dream also fits into the idea of the museum; the careful arranging of one's life as if on display, the importance of artifice in career, spouse, house, car. It is important to keep in mind that museums in themselves are separate both mentally and physically from the real world. When first Jim breaks Laura's favorite glass piece, the unicorn, it seems as a sort of tearing down of Laura's imaginative world. In a way, however, Laura does the same for Jim. Whether he realizes it or not, by reminding him of his glory days in high school Laura points to the failure and insufficiency of the American Dream in his current life. Jim works a very average job in the factory, only speaks of rising in the ranks and entering into politics (his taking a course in rhetoric is a clear-cut example of artifice), and even in this encounter with Laura it's possible he is even unsatisfied with his fiancée. When she gives Jim the broken unicorn, I think it is partially part of her coming to terms with reality, and yet also burdening him with a token of that broken imaginative realm.

On this same note, the last line of Tom's—"Blow out your candles, Laura—and so, goodnight…"—really lingers in the mind as a testament and summation of the entire play (due again, perhaps, to Tom's intentional crafting). Candles as a general symbol

seem to encapsulate life and hope, but by blowing them out I certainly don't believe Tom is demanding that Laura end her life or relinquish all hope. Perhaps these candles, as the glass menagerie, are devices of this imaginative world, creators of this soft deceptive light (which reminds me of how Blanche manipulates light in).

It is troubling, the dark void the audience is left with when Laura does blow her candles out, as if her imaginative realm—the American Dream, all escapism—leaves in life a gaping nothingness when stripped away.

, Friday December 31st

The discussion in class of the playwright Clifford Odets greatly aided me in my appreciation and analysis of . To give a brief recap, Odets was one of the figures instrumental in the development of Method acting. The basic idea of the school of acting is to create a character from the inside out, the actor building it from themselves. Odets apparently was an advocate of group theatre, which involved improvisation, and the summoning of personal experiences to bring to the emotional experiences of the character in the play. The goal, then, was to end with a form as naturalistic as possible, in so much as that the actor actually inhabits the character, and that the character is specific to the person playing it.

All of this comes into play when I say I believe I saw some of the finest acting on the trip that night. It never felt as though I were watching a character or an actor on stage, but rather a person simply living their life. Because the play rested so heavily on the characters and their relations, it was of utmost importance that they were believable enough to evoke that catharsis from the audience by the conclusion of the play. Jenny Seagrove as Georgie, in particular, was simply captivating in all her mannerisms, the voice she adopted; even the way she carried herself was a testament to the painstaking character work Seagrove must have gone through.

Odets's involvement in the development of Method acting is also intriguing when digging into the plot of the play. Frank, a former star actor now past his glory years, is cast in a play by Bernie despite his stumbling through the lines at the audition. This certainly places Frank as a Method actor, who works better when he can inhabit a character rather than force himself into a prescribed notion of that character on the page.

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, Saturday January 1st

What first comes to mind about this production of is the intensity and grittiness that it first took off with: in the street-fight between the Capulets and the Montagues you felt real malice, a hatred that may not have been as riveting in a staged fencing sword fight. It is unfortunate, then, that the production does not carry the fervor of the physical fight between the two households into the dramatic action of the play. We witnessed their feud, yes, but it seemed to take the back burner as spectacle to the love story between Romeo and Juliet. This same vivacity appears again at the ball in the Capulets house, where the two lovers first meet. There was a tremendous dance number that had the feel of some tribal ritual; Juliet threw her full back and shoulders into every move she made, contorting her body and whipping her hair as if demonstrating the emotional toll her adolescence is taking on her. Romeo is as captivated as we are, and the revelry freezes as they meet for their holy palmer's kiss. In some ways, I think the love story suffers from the emphasis this particular production places on it, as it is not meant to carry the cathartic weight of the whole play. It's not that the actors who portrayed Romeo and Juliet were not convincing—on the contrary they were remarkably earnest and grounded at the same time—rather the nature of the fast-paced action, how quickly

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I am being decidedly critical, however, for on the whole I think the production was successful. There was an energy in the revitalization that I had not witnessed in any previous production of the tale on stage or screen. Both Romeo and Juliet were endowed with a sort of modern free-

, Sunday January 2

for Hamlet to overcome the

, Monday January 3rd

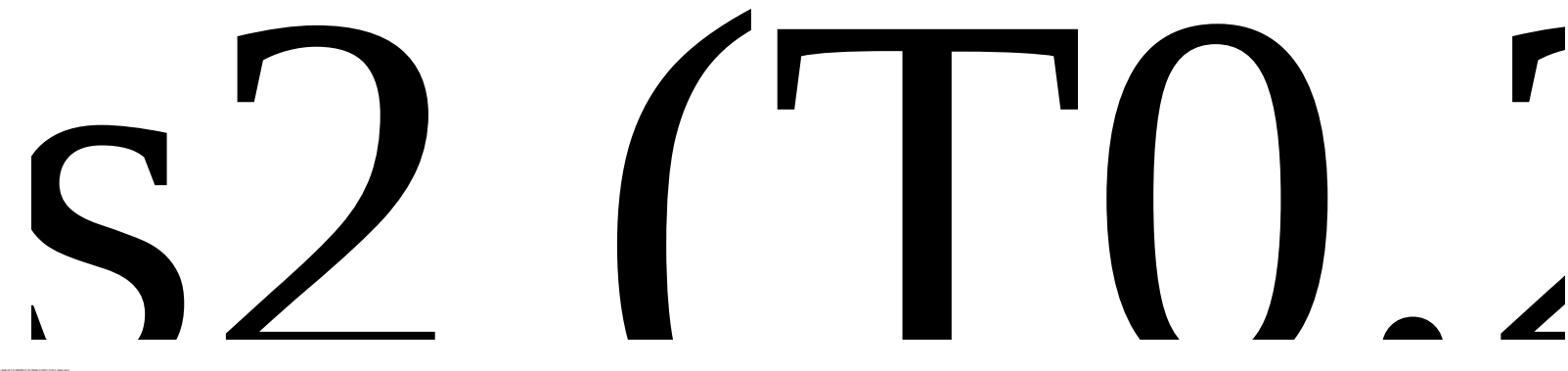
There was a contagious energy to that I still cannot seem to shake. It was incredibly affecting with its combination of the primal force of fairy tales, and the spectacle of dance and music, with some deep-

As far as the folk/fairy tale strain throughout Billy that was brought up in class and in Lee Hall's essay, I entirely agree with that assessment of the story. Billy reminds

makes the great reveal—in front of a great amount of the party, too—that Gerald is in fact his estranged son (and Gerald is as taken aback as Illingworth). The second half is extremely shorter, and jumps straight back into the action as Gerald proposes that his mother and Illingworth be married. Gerald is not worried about the happiness of his mother, but rather his own reputation now as the illegitimate son of an ambassador; he fears his career is ruined. In an extended confrontation between Arbuthnot and

, Thursday January 6th

details the dramatic issues of one family that stem from the extreme poverty they live in, and also the power of poverty to break down gender roles, familial expectations, and at the same time provide a sense of solidarity, community, and graciousness. It does seem that poverty is the driving force in the play, like the way time, love, or social standing operates in other productions we saw. Maggie and John are the parental heads of the family, and it seems be more of a matriarchal society as Maggie is the one that makes money for the family, while John is unemployed. The two make countless sacrifices for their children: almost starving themselves so their children may eat, sleeping on a mattress in the kitchen so the others can have beds, etc. They manage to keep a light-hearted spirit in daily family life despite their circumstances, and there is much humor in the interactions with their younger children and with their granny. The drama seems to enter with the three other adult females in the play: Maggie's sister Lily, a feminist, who is self-sustaining (a strong 0.2 (ho 0.2 (h/F1.0 1 T 2 -0.2 (t2 ((t) 0.2 (h:) 0.2 (ns) -0.2 ((r rc



characters, and from there they become people—each endowed with their own goodness and fault, each left to deal with their sparse situations as they will. On this note, it is easy to group Isa and Jenny together at the beginning as the two young troublemakers, blind and selfish in their youth and beauty. By the end of the play, however, the two swing in quite opposite directions: Isa breaks away from the family while Jenny returns to them. It

, Friday January 7th

Henrik Ibsen's , while enthralling and confounding in countless aspects, most swept me up in the mysterious Hilda Wangel. Perhaps it was only the portrayal of Hilda by the captivating Gemma Arterton, but I believe the character alone latched onto my thoughts, despite or maybe encouraged by Arterton's feral, seductive, yet bouncy and childlike take on her. Even on the level of costuming, Hilda's look was starkly different from Halvard Solness, the master builder himself, and his somber wife Aline. Aline is appropriately dressed in black and lots of it—her Puritan lifestyle is surely manifested in her costume and its covering from below the ankle all the way up above her collar bone. Halvard, while not as conservative as his wife, still wears a formal business suit, polished and dignified as the master builder should be. However, as his mental health degrades throughout the play, he appears less and less comfortable in his suit, as if it clings to him like a second skin, one that he sheds upon his ascent to the Tower at the end of the play. Hilda's costuming however is not restrictive in form or movement at all, but rather allows and exaggerates her physicality with its sheer, flowing quality. She often walked barefoot, indicating some sort of connection with the earth that the other characters did not share, and many of her clothes were worn loosely to expose as much skin as natural without being openly obscene (quite the opposite of Aline, as it seems).

So Hilda is, as her clothes suggest of her, some sort of otherworldly sprite or siren, or perhaps a daimon, or even some image of Satan. Whatever she is (for that's part of her beauty, that she is not clearly drawn as any of these), I did not get the impression she was a natural human being. Although the play does fall in the lines of Ibsen's realist

drama, I believe Hilda was an intentional slip in the realism, or that is to say that Hilda is representative of a kind of psychological realism—a character that is realistic in the mind though perhaps not in the actual world. Perhaps the mystical quality of Hilda is in that she lends herself to so many possibilities as a force of nature; she fits in perfectly with

’s discussion of will and madness. After all, it is entirely possible that Hilda is the living and breathing will of Solness, she who realizes his wishes so he is only left to ponder the means and not the ends. And, again, it is also possible that Hilda is Solness’s own madness running wild and free in the world, driving him to places that he would not go were he in his right mind (for example, the top of the Tower when he is afraid of heights). Although I doubt she is literally playing the role of Satan, I think she does exhibit certain Satanic qualities: She blares onto the scene demanding a castle in the air that he had promised her 10 years ago when he kissed her, a set-up that loosely echoes the concept of Satan demanding the souls from those who made bargains with him. Also, on this same note, the Hilda’s line that ends the play (“ master builder. Mine.”) is particularly effective as Arterton interpreted it, with the emphasis on the “my”, and then a tantalizing little snatching gesture with the word “mine”, as if she were scooping his soul out of the air to keep it for herself. In a quite separate spiritual role, Hilda could also function as Solness’s daimon, as a sort of personal spirit that gives inspiration and guidance. Like Socrates’s daimon, however, it can also lead to the destructishi40.3 (m)0pmon0.2 (s) 0 (on

illuminating presence breaking into the darkness of his mind (the light at the end of the tunnel, if you will). In other words, whatever Hilda may be she brought Solness to his death, but also to a sort of peace in his life, and in this she functions as a psychological exercise in coming to terms with mortality, and defines what a fraught and multifaceted process it is.

, Saturday January 8th

Before seeing , I heard that it was meant to be a suspenseful thriller, and this sort of, well, surprised me. I had never seen or heard of thriller plays before, and

audience realizes in the first act that Sidney and Clifford are in cahoots, and then later when their intentions to undermine each other are revealed in a literal fight to the death). Levin intentionally fills up the space between with equal parts humor and drama. The humor adds a lightness to the script, situates the audience with the characters (for example, the many self-referential remarks Sidney makes about the script, basically Levin making fun of himself), and perhaps intentionally makes them more at ease than they should be, rendering the peaks of suspense even more effective. He does the same with the drama, drawing the audience in a closer to the characters (for example, the

think these concluding deaths, then, take on a sort of foil of Romeo and Juliet: they kill each other and not themselves, they do so out of jealousy and greed rather than love and selflessness, and their death merely passes on the conflict they died over rather than resolves it. Levin provides a compelling story that can strike fear into a modern audience; the killings seem more plausible to us because of their malice, and that is a troubling thought indeed (especially for those of us considering playwriting as a profession).