

Journal

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Cinderella – New Wimbledon Theater, 12/29/2008

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: *Cinderella* was a musical pantomime which, though principally geared towards children, also catered to adults. The director's vision was to take the age-old story of *Cinderella* and make it quintessentially English, via the actual dialogue itself and certain stylistic tropes historically present in the English arts. There were also many interesting decisions to break the fourth wall, in the form of the ventriloquists but again, also with the dialogue.

Setting: The New Wimbledon Theater venue was perfect for the show: lots of open space for a large audience, also allowing for the focal point to be the entire stage itself. In other words, the theater was great for a

a pliable character meant to interject current ~~to~~ and modern humor into a show. There were also numerous stylistic tropes used to tie ~~viewer~~ in with the unique traditions of British theater. For instance, the two Step-Sisters in ~~age~~ bus drag go all the way back to the days of Gilbert and Sullivan (later taken to new heights ~~by~~ Monty Python). The scene in which the car breaks down and the actors ~~utilize~~ repetition harkens back ~~to~~ a unique form of British vaudeville-ism which predates ~~ev~~ the drag. The antiphony between ~~the~~ crowd and stage, while not that different from the American antiphony ~~of~~ own children, utilizes different phrases which I'm sure become ingrained in the children themselves.

The program for the play stresses how many ~~versions~~ of the Cinderella story there are, briefly describing the Italian, ~~Egyptian~~, and Romanian versions. This is meant to attune the audience to the fact ~~that~~ *this is a uniquely British version of the story. The Director's goal was to create a uniquely British version of a universal story, and I personally feel he accomplished*

almost homo-erotic moments in his initial engagements with Spooner. His constant speeches about foreign lands offer the exact opposite of No Man's Land: exotic locations to roam, explore, and savor. Even his costuming, with his bright red shirt, speaks of a romanticized existence full of life, exuberance, and inspiration. His lament at the end of the play, "I didn't need to come back," hints at the fact that Hirst's isolation is self-imposed.

Briggs, on the other hand, represents the down-to-earth, masculine, practical side of Hirst's personality. He is not the romantic side of an artist, but the practical side which keeps one's feet rooted in reality. His speech to Spooner in which he describes giving directions to Hirst is indicative of a connection to home, not Hirst's self-imposed No Man's Land. His hyper-masculine nature represents strength and self control, two things utterly lacking in Hirst now, who is in a powerless state and powerless to control/help himself. Once again, the costuming, particularly his sleeveless shirt and leather gloves suggest a masculinity, that when paired with the almost-feminine nature of Foster create two opposite yet necessary parts of Hirst's personality. Yet though present, they are unable to help Hirst break out of No Man's Land (a claim actually leveled against them by Spooner).

Ultimately, the play ends in a tragedy, one Hirst ignores the artist within himself (Spooner), his poetical wanderlust (Foster), or his practicality and connection to home (Briggs), and remains in his self-imposed No Man's Land.

Personal Musings: I had no idea that the actors we were using in this show were the various faces I had seen on the TV and big screen. Though I appreciate the work of Michael Gambon and David Bradley, I was truly blown away by the fact that I was able to see David Walliams, who I find to be a genius comedy writer and actor in his TV show *Little Britain*. So that was a wonderful surprise and treat for me. Even more so, seeing that he can be serious as well. I found that much of Pinter's dialogue reminded me of Melville's *Moby Dick* in the way that within huge passages there will be literal gems of phrases; phrases that stay with you the rest of your life due to their power. They also serve as great song titles! These phrases also work well in this show, because the dialogue is meant to be "obscure" much of the time, but it deceptively is not, as these sudden phrases/musings act like a shock to the viewer, immediately drawing attention to the speaker again. Much like Haydn's symphony!

I love shows in which much of the interpretation is left to the viewer. In the audience, it was interesting to see that different people laughed at different times. At the end, during Foster's final speech, many people laughed and thought it was funny, while I found it a heartbreaking and desperate last attempt for him. One interpretation is not better than the other obviously, but a play which acts as a half-completed canvas upon which the viewer can fill in the rest is always my favorite kind of show.

War Horse – Olivier Theatre, 12/30/2008

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: This interpretation is a study on the idea of "brotherhood", with brotherhood abstractly mirroring the relationships between individuals of both sexes, humans and animals, and humanity (as this case represented in the form of the countries battling in World War I). This abstraction of the term "brotherhood" is supported artistically by the Director's abstract representation, as evidenced by the sets, props, and physical choices made. Also, the idea that from hostility can spring eventual peace is also paramount.

Setting: Even though *War Horse* will be moving to the West End soon, it is very hard to imagine the show taking place anywhere other than the National Theatre's Olivier Theatre. Firstly and most importantly, there was full utilization of the massive stage in an effort to place a huge emphasis on space. While the stage itself is huge, it was also sparsely furnished in terms of set; the only constant backdrop was the elevated screen in the form of a ripped piece of paper; the largest actual set pieces were the basic doorways. This ties in with the romanticized version of the horse itself: a large range within which to run free. This sense of space is immediately reinforced in one of the first scenes of the show via juxtaposition, when the Joey the colt is penned in by men holding gates. This sense of open space is also key later in the show, as it is able to provide more than enough room for imagined battlefields, marching grounds, and yards. In other words, quote Antoine de Saint-Exupery: "Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing left to add, when there is nothing left to take away."

Audience and Interpretation: The audience for this show is meant to be universal, i.e. all ages. While the the human/animal connection shown between the actors and puppets (particularly with the little French girl) are enough to keep children engaged, the larger themes of WWI, inter-family conflict, and the philosophy of brotherhood are there for the

Brotherhood between humans and animals is the most obvious form shown in *War Horse*, most notably between Albert and Joey. However, it is also evidence by the relationship

Gethsemane– Cottesloe Theatre, 12/30/2008

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: *Gethsemane* offers a window into the lives of those involved in British politics. However, the realm of British politics is an arbitrary (yet interesting and relevant) location chosen for what are two universal themes: those of persistence and doubt. While the biblical Gethsemane references a moment of doubt on a path of "good," the show *Gethsemane*, through its several characters, shows people at different points in the process: those persisting in what they see as "right" despite doubt, those persisting in what they see as "wrong" despite doubt, and those who choose to persist at all due to their doubt. By offering varying

daughter, Suzette, due to the fact that Meredith is always too busy working. Yet, despite all of these doubts, and knowing the rather dire consequences, Meredith co

First of all, it was obvious that many of the Directorial stage directions were designed to fit Tennet perfectly. There was no way to avoid it for Edward Bennet. However, I felt like I

Loot – Tricycle Theatre, 1/2/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision of the Director was essentially to remain true to Joe Orton's witty yet sally relevant script. Through staging the black comedy in its original time, which the social satire's remain

Personal Musings:

A Little Night Music – Menier Chocolate Factory Theater, 1/2/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The Director's vision for *A Little Night Music* was to remain as close to the original script as possible in both setting and character, but while also placing a strong yet subtle emphasis on the theme of

the class boundaries she was hit on, and since sex is fleeting she's trapped. These are only a few of the struggles present, since almost everyone in the show faces them.

There are also some very interesting juxtapositions around the theme of time. While all of the main "adult" characters are engaging in duplicitous, sneaky motives, and crazy affairs, it appears that the "children" (minus Anne) and the Grandmother are the wisest characters in the show. Heinrich makes his speech during dinner addressing the whole lot of adults, while he himself is really just as conflicted as they are. However, it is Frederica who is constantly saving situations due to her intelligence and wits: whether it be her help to distract the Dragoon or to look for Heinrich with Anne (thus saving Heinrich's life).

The Grandmother herself also represents the theme of wisdom amidst chaos. Though she had her own period of chaos, and remains nostalgic about it, she is subtle enough to show that she learned her lesson, the hard way about love, through the story of the man who gave her the wooden ring. Thus, during the first real scene after the introductory musical number, we see Frederica and the Grandmother sitting together, just as we do in the last scene. The two extremes of age within the play, the youngest and the oldest and both the smartest. They represent the bookends of time itself: Frederica is smart due to the fact that she is still rather innocent and unaffected by feelings of romance, while the Grandmother is wise due to having lived through it all. The two of them together present the passage of time, the passage of life, itself. Innocence, the madness of adulthood, and the relative nostalgic peace of old age. In other words, a wonderful juxtaposition.

Personal Musings: I have seen *A Little Night Music* twice before: this was by far the best production of it I have ever seen. I've often found that in musicals, especially Sondheim for some reason, while the actors can sing, the acting can be lacking. This was certainly not the case here; I thought both the music and the acting itself were perfect as they could be. The staging, and theater itself, definitely fits the aforementioned new form of Sondheim interpretation, which I feel is far the better. Being able to see every little facial expression, and to hear every sound, down to the sound of a creaking door, is fantastic, and makes the show that much more intense, realistic, and engaging.

I personally loved the emphasis placed on the theme of time, which I have never seen so prominently displayed within the production before. The subtlety with which it was represented was genius.

Thus far, I can say that this will probably prove to be the most definitive performance of this show that I will ever see, and that this was my favorite show seen on this trip (up to this point)!

The Cordelia Dream– Wilton’s Music Hall, 1/3/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director’s Vision: *The Cordelia Dream* is a case study in jealousy: how it affects the feeler, how it affects the target and varying responses of both. This jealousy is made all the more complicated by the fact that it occurs between a father and his daughter, both of whom are musicians, thus creators. By stressing the jealousy aspect, the play is able to show how this emotion then impacts the creative process, both for the better and for the worse. In short, the theme of the show is jealousy and how it shapes the creative lives of two related musicians.

Setting: I do not know whether this show was written for the theater in which it was performed, but if it was not, then it was certainly a gargantuan stroke of luck that it was staged at Wilton’s Music Hall. We have yet to see a venue which more perfectly captured the entire vibe of the show itself. The complete lack of any heating lent credence to the isolation in which the father lived, with its pure lack of amenities. During the second act, the cold lent an almost ethereal quality to many of the events taking place, putting emphasis on the fact that the daughter may indeed be a ghost (though I do not believe this to be the case).

Audience and Intention: We are privy to the fact that due to his massive jealousy against his daughter, who found musical fame while he did not, the father has secluded himself away, and is slowly losing himself in his own world. His daughter feels tremendous guilt and anger at her father, and is willing to give up music in order for him to be happier. Hence, in the first act, we see that jealousy has stifled the creativity of the father, but as a target, the daughter is willing to surrender her own creativity in order to make him happy.

But in the second act, we see that the father has still not surrendered his jealousy, therefore his creativity is still stifled. Not only that, but he has lost his mind and is slowly dying. In the words of T.S. Eliot “Dissipation is much worse than cataclysm.” His daughter appears to him, almost as a ghost (though I believe her to be real). She has reconciled herself as the target of her father’s jealousy, and has forgiven him. Not only that, she pities him, for she knows that he has essentially dug his own grave. The message here is that jealousy, when not dealt with, will only increase, and that it absolutely destroys the creative. And if the target of jealousy can learn to forgive, and even pity the prosecutor, she will be the better for it and retain control, unlike the father who loses his mind.

Personal Musings: First of all, I am very angry that I missed the opportunity to see the question and answer period with the actors post-show; I had no idea it was going to happen! And I had so many questions! Next time.

Had I put two and two together (meaning I realized the significance of the name “Cordelia”) I would have certainly given myself a refresher course in *King Lear* before seeing the show, because I think the unnamed references to *King Lear* in the show would have been

more obvious to me at the time of viewing, probably could have given me even more to write about during this journal entry.

The complete dedication of David Hargrave to his part was incredible: I have only once seen a play in which the actor was already acting when the doors opened. Not only that, but he was able to remain scantily dressed, during intermission, when it was about 45 degrees. The man never left the stage for three hours, which is unheard of amount of time to have to remain 100% in character. It was the acting equivalent to running a marathon, and I was very impressed. The opening of the second act in which he conducts an imaginary symphony was incredibly powerful, moving, and even a little disturbing; which, come to think of it, was like the whole show!

Oedipus– Olivier Theatre, 1/4/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The Director's vision in Oedipus was to put a very heavy stress on the *continuously* of Oedipus' gradual yet constant descent from ruler to powerless insanity. This stress was represented through himself, the choices made by the actors, and even the simple fact that there was no intermission. Almost everything onstage pushed the theme of *change over time*. The idea was to illustrate the viewer the complete destruction of Oedipus right before our eyes, so no space in-between: his complete downfall, which in a brutally ironic way, terminated with the destruction of Oedipus' own ability to see.

Setting: The set appears simple at first. However, the set of Oedipus contributed more than any other show seen thus far to the vision of the Director and the plot/themes of the show.

The utilization of the rotating stage in Olivier Theater was fantastic! It was slow, almost unnoticeable at first, but the floor itself acted as a metaphor for Oedipus' slow breakdown as a human being. Once it began, it mirrored his fate, which was a constant, flowing process, which ceased to stop, just like the rotating stage. The slowly rotating stage can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the passage of time, because the stage could be seen as a clock turning around a fixed point, th

opening scene is the most important in the show because it illustrates every one of Oedipus' finer virtues. Once those virtues have been laid out, the audience can truly view how Oedipus is destroyed via the systematic disappearance of all these qualities he possesses.

We first begin to witness his downfall as he starts losing his temper in his increasingly urgent need for resolution. His treatment of Jocasta is terrible due to both the nature of the news and the fact that we see a huge crack in Oedipus' mental armor: the entrance of fear. Fear in the form of prophesy. This inspires him to unwisely banish Creon.

Oedipus has also removed both his jacket and shirt at this point in the show. This slow, gradual undressing of Oedipus is yet another subtle but incredibly important indicator of his mental state. He keeps losing clothes, and what clothes remain become unkempt and eventually bloodstained.

As we learn of his history, we also are exposed not only to more fear but also Oedipus' ability to rage to the point of homicide. Yet again Oedipus breaking down. Without summarizing the well-known plot, over the course of the show he further loses composure. He screams, cries, rages, attacks, until his final act of self-mutilation. The genius of this production is that we see all of this onstage. Oedipus' character disintegration occurs in full view; the only time it does not is when he actually gouges out his eyes, but even then we see the total aftermath, unedited. We are a constant witness to his demise.

It should also be noted that there was a strong element of "turning to the womb" throughout the show. Oedipus is constantly putting his head against his stomach, and he lays down with his head in her lap on multiple occasions just before the news that she is his mother. She comforts him like a child, not like he was a grown man and her husband. At the end of the show, we see Oedipus essentially in the state of a newly born (if not pre-born) baby: he is completely powerless, screaming, and finally not really even able to move without additional help. When his children crowd around him, he seems on an equal level as them, not able to act as a comforting parent, but only as a fellow victim. He has not only made the fall from total power to powerless, but also the fall from man to child.

Simply put: since the acting and staging are so continuous, we are able to view all these little "straws to break the camel's back" as it were. The straws are many, and initially can be dealt with, but we are witness to the continuation of yet more and more straws which also become larger themselves, until Oedipus himself is finally broken.

Personal Musings: I have seen many shows in my short lifetime, with innumerable actors. I have never seen a more commanding actor than R. J. Diennes on stage before. He owned the stage, he was captivating to a degree I have never seen. I have never seen anyone with so much presence onstage, and I might never again. His performance was incredible, and I consider it an honor to have seen his last performance in the role.

I loved this production, and respect it: where a Director and cast are able to take a show in which everyone knows the ending and plot (for thousands of years no less!) and

create something totally capturing and original, they deserve incredible amounts of praise.
This show was fantastic.

In a Dark Dark House – Almeida Theatre, 1/5/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The Director's vision for *In a Dark Dark House* was to highlight metaphorical shadows, to tie in with the repetition of "dark" in the title of the play. Lurking underneath any surface or situation, not how bright or seemingly innocent (in the form of Jennifer) or familial (the relationship between Terry and Drew), there is a literal and figurative darker side to everything. Exploring and exposing that darker side was the vision for this show. On the flip side of every shiny coin is always a shadow, and in this case is an unsettling portrait of human existence.

Setting: The Almeida Theatre was small, which is the only kind of theatre I could imagine a show like this taking place in; one needs the intimacy of a small theatre in order to read the facial expressions and feel closer to what is being said. It indeed made some quite intense emotions.

There is something to be said for the fact that this show takes place in America, with characters from the Tri-State area. The characters themselves tend to represent American stereotypes: the macho-tough guy who hides his emotions (Terry), the slick good-looking morally corrupt businessman (Drew), and the oversized teenage lolita (Jennifer). Also, one theme of the show, homosexuality, is shown to be completely taboo amongst these Americans, whereas in Europe and Great Britain it remains more accepted.

The stage itself remained unchanged throughout the three acts, and it acted as a rather with backdrops.

only real "love" he felt came in the form of Todd the abuser. Hence, we see that Terry's shadow, his abuse, was actually a light the time. Yet, when we see the after-effects of the abuse, the light once again becomes a shadow. But does it really? Upon visiting Todd, Terry became upset that Todd did not recognize him after all the years had gone by, not due to the abuse itself. The whole relationship remains frustratingly confusing for the audience as it should be, for it is how Terry feels as well.

Drew, initially, comes off as a sleazy, corrupt rich lawyer who never really grew up, in both mannerisms and actions alike. But we begin to feel for Drew, after we found out that he was molested by Todd too. The audience sympathizes: we see the light emerging from the shadow that is Drew himself. But at the end of the show when we find out Drew was lying the whole time about his molestation, all sympathy is erased, and we see that he is willing to betray the trust of literally everyone in his life, no matter what the cost; this time the cost being his brother's psyche, as the show closes with sheveled and broken Terry abandoned in Drew's back garden while Drew resumes the festivities at his fancy party.

Jennifer is meant to represent a kind of innocence. However, this is not eternal innocence, but realistic innocence: innocence which is always, no matter what, lost. Sometimes it is crushed completely, such as in the case of Terry and his physical/sexual abuse. In Act II, we find Terry almost looking at a mirror image of himself as a young teen: witty, sociable, and isolated. We find the very real situation of a man wanting to relive a traumatic situation, only this time as perpetrator. Is Terry seducing Jennifer for the pure sexual thrill? To deal with his own abuse by acting as abuser? Or is he trying to get revenge on Todd by engaging in sex with his underage daughter? We do not really know except for the fact that Terry could not go through with the act. In Jennifer we see how quickly what is bright and innocent can be turned into a shadow.

Everyone in the show, even the unnamed characters, is based on social masks that they wore for the world: Terry's for sanity, Drew's for manipulation, Jennifer's as innocence etc. However, beneath every mask lay shadows, and metaphorical Dark Dark places of everyone's lives.

Personal Musings: Right off the bat, I need to say that I have never in my life experienced such intense tension during a scene as during Act II of *A Dark Dark House*. From the second we see a young girl in a compromising situation being watched by Terry to the opening to the very end, the audience is on the very edge of its seat. The character of Jennifer was played brilliantly by Kira Sternbach throughout.

Believe it or not, I actually thought the New York accents got better over the course of the show; in the beginning I thought I heard through them, whereas at the end they sounded natural. Maybe that was just getting into the show itself.

I found the character of Drew to be so irritating. No matter what the scene, he is always either smiling or crying: always exaggerated expressions. The same is true with his speech, in which he sounds more like a frat boy than a lawyer. However, the one singular time we hear

Drew speak normally and see his face as neutral at the very end of the show, when Terry grabs him and calls him out for lying. In that instance we see Drew drop his façade, because he has been exposed. Once that happens, he puts his honorable best he can and leaves. But we really see how beneath everything Drew does is this base Darwinian instinct of "Kill or be killed." Sinister indeed.

I enjoyed seeing this show as paired with others thus far. While we have seen some darker material, it at many times was abstract and stoical. The dark side of this show was based firmly in reality, which made it all the more different and powerful. Believe it or not, it's a welcome reprieve from the abstract!

Romeo and Juliet– Courtyard Theatre, 1/7/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The Director's vision for *Romeo and Juliet*, rather strangely, was not to put the emphasis on the tragic story. Instead, the focus was placed on the *space between people, both in the physical and mental sense*. Questions were being posed: how can closeness breed hostility and violence between strangers and intra-familial alike? When can that same closeness breed love and friendship? And most interestingly, how close is

Don John– The Courtyard Theatre, 1/7/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision for *Don John*, an adaptation of the opera *Don Giovanni*, was to create a chaotic, whimsical, ~~is~~ colorful, loud, intense, million-facet world, yet manage to find and highlight the ~~one~~ aspect of that world which matters: love. Despite everything taking place around oneself, ~~in~~ form of world news (the British strike), faith (in the form of the Preacher), pop culture ~~in~~ (in the form of the sets and costumes), altered reality (alcohol and drugs), ~~in~~ the form of lust (the character of Don John, amongst others), what ultimately matters in the end is ~~is~~ *love*, incredibly difficult but worthwhile.

Setting: In stark contrast to *Romeo and Juliet*, which utilized minimalism only hours before, *Don John's* stage was immense and intricate: multiple scaffolding; industrial shipping crates at all levels which are portable, an actual band on stage right, multiple TVs flashing images, radio's constantly changing ~~stations~~, falling balloons, and even a disco ball. The costumes are vintage 1970s kitsch, with bell ~~bottoms~~, flower prints, incredibly bright and contrasting colors, tacky suits, cowboy boots, animal prints, ~~and~~ a wonderful combination of a navy blue oversized wooly sweater over ~~other~~ pants (Don John's personal ~~attire~~). The music, both recorded and live, is intense ~~so~~ bombastic, and has a Phil Spector ~~all~~ "of sound" vibe to it. [Of personal note to me: I have been a guitar player ~~my~~ life, and since we were sitting right in front of the band, I had a good look ~~at~~ the guitarists' gear. Everything he used, from the guitar to the amplifier to the pedals ~~was~~ vintage 1970s gear!].

The reason for the 1970s culture blitz is ~~to~~ create the aforementioned intense chaotic reality, in which it is easy for oneself to become ~~lost~~ or led astray by the ~~real~~ natural environment, the people in it, and the opportunities it presents.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show ~~is~~ adults. The themes are ones which would only really be grasped by adults, and ~~almost~~ all of the show's situations, be they sexual, violent, or drug induced, are meant for a mature audience.

In this chaotic world which has been created ~~by~~ all aspects of the setting, we are privy to a host of failed "loves". Don John himself is ~~the~~ obvious main example of this: even in midst of his titanic number of sexual conquests, he is ~~alone~~ and devoid of ~~real~~ love. He uses his hanger-on Nobby as a companion/lover, but there ~~is~~ no real love there, just dependency. Seeking solace in sex, pills, and alcohol, Don John eventually ~~is~~ trying to fill the hole in his life left by an absence of love.

But we also see other failed instances ~~of~~. Alan the preacher and Anna have a failed relationship, because he is too reserved/busy to

consuming infatuation with Don John after a single one-night-stand for love, essentially stalking him, but to no avail. Nobby is a perpetual leech, looking for validation as second-fiddle to Don Jon, and then indulging in the “scraps” that Don John discards, this case that being Elvira.

The only true instance of love that we find is between Derek and Zerlina. It would seem unlikely: Zerlina is an attractive extrovert, and Derek is a rather homely awkward man. Zerlina can barely speak English, and Derek speaks his P. Zerlina actually cheats on Derek with Don John, the man who also seriously beats up Derek after the fact. However, theirs is the relationship which is being illustrated as true love by this production: even though they have both made mistakes and faced challenges, despite the crazed world which surrounds them, they are resolved to keep trying. It will never be perfect, because nothing

August: Osage County– Lyttelton Theatre, 1/8/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision for this was to present an emotionally-loaded tragic comedy exposing the many varied inter-familial relationships found within the Weston family, and in the greater scheme of things, all families. The idea was to provide a literal window into the lives of these characters, seen different ones at the same time. However, the term used to describe *August: Osage County* should not be tragic comedy, but comedic tragedy: while the play is hilarious at times, the ending is so eerie and dark that one must apply the emphasis on tragedy. While the theme of family unrest is universal, the exact situations themselves never are. Tolstoy said in the opening lines of *Anna Karenina* that "happy families are all alike: every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." This is certainly true in Osage County.

Setting: The setting tied in perfectly with the vision of the show. We are provided with a complete three-story cross section of a house which we can see into almost every single room completely, with the exception of the kitchen, which is only partial. Because of this, we are able to see multiple scenes at once: people talking downstairs while Violet is staring out the window recovering from an outburst and Bill is smoking on the side; the entire family sitting for dinner while Johanna is busy cooking etc. We see almost everything in the show except the suicide of Beverly, which occurs outside of the house anyways.

Setting this show in Oklahoma provides yet more interesting aspects to the family issue: there tends to be a stronger emphasis on family in the southern United States. There is also a tendency to either stay put one's hometown for good or to leave for good. This tension comes into play between many of the characters, particularly between the three Weston sisters, two of whom have left and feel removed from the home, and one of whom remained at the home and is thus resentful. Violet appears to have an inferiority complex for those who left Osage county, constantly berating herself and her husband for "not being good enough" to the outsiders, albeit this is done maliciously and sarcastically.

Audience and Intention: The audience for this show is adults. The themes are ones which would only really be grasped by adults, and almost all of the show's situations, be they sexual, violent, or drug induced, are meant for a mature audience.

We are shown many different strained family relationships, the most prominent of which is that of Violet with her daughters and ultimately, once we hear how she essentially let Beverly die, her husband. We see the strained relationships between the sisters themselves, one of which is living the life of a soon-to-be divorcee with a daughter, one who is trying to fulfill her dreams of money by marrying rich, and one of whom remained home. The Fordham's, eldest sister being the mother, are getting a divorce, and their teenage daughter is filled with teenage angst. Troy, the rich man Karen intends to marry, makes proper passes at Molly the teenager, to

which Karen is willing to turn a blind eye to live her dream, now tarnished. The Aiken family is run by the constant complaints and grievances of Mattie Fay. Her son, Little Charles, obvious has a social disability and is coping on a secret affair with Ivy who happens to be his half-sister (though they don't know it).

All of this in fact sounds like a soap opera, and it should. All of these characters have strained connections with each other; some of the connections are positive, but most are negative. When you take these many strained connections and put them all together, then you have the literal madhouse which is the house in OCS County. In fact, it was the collective scenes which were the strongest: with all of the personal conflicts now established, it was as though one was watching a time bomb, waiting for it to go off due to any number of catalysts. Act II, during which the family has the mourning dinner, which ends in a powerful crescendo and a seizing of power, is a great example of this.

Throughout the show we have Johanna, the housekeeper, looking on. The fact that she is a Native American amongst rural white people already gives her a mystique, both to the characters and the audience. She does not do anything throughout the show, but it's what other characters do to her that is important. The character of Johanna represents *the white*, in every way. However, she does not represent a cure, the opposite in fact. She is often sought as relief for an already-destroyed situation. For instance, at the opening of the show, Beverly is essentially able to get one last conversation in, with Johanna while hiring her, before he leaves to quite possibly commit suicide. Molly retreats to Johanna's room to smoke pot, but smoking due to the fact that her parents are getting a divorce. Joanna saves Molly from the advances of Troy via a frying pan, but the disclosure of this act in itself destroys the dreams of Karen, embarrasses the entire family, and marks the breaking-up point of the family as people leave the house.

And finally, Johanna is sought at the end of the show by Violet, after we find out that Violet let Beverly die rather than save him in order to obtain money. The house is darkened and, for once, empty. Violet reverts back to a childlike state, eventually screaming and stumbling her way into Johanna's lap. Johanna offers no advice, instead reciting the words of T.S. Eliot, the man whose words kicked off the show.

In these situations, to which Joanna finds temporary respite, there is no happy ending. The entire show is a demonstration that even family love, the familial bonds which are meant to last from birth until death, can be completely and permanently broken. No hope, no future, no happy ending.

comedy needed to be inserted into the show otherwise all of the tragedy would not have been possible: 1) it would wear the audience down, 2) it's unrealistic and 3) the tragedy seems

possible: 1) it would wear the a

Twelfth Night – Wyndham's Theatre, 1/8/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The artistic vision for this show (the ideas of no less than Kenneth Branagh) was to create a light, almost "breezy" setting, which in turn would be copied in the actions of the characters themselves, who change loves and appearances almost on a whim, like the wind. While other productions might place a stronger emphasis on the struggles

social pecking order when he is imprisoned perceived insanity: the exact opposite of his restrained, socially-conscious character. In the end, he reverts back to his original demeanor.

Family Reunion – Donmar Warehouse, 1/9/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The purpose of this show, though done in an abstract and complicated way, is actually quite simple. It means to ask a single question: *What is reality?* And by proxy, if reality itself is being questioned, then what is family? How can human beings define their relationships to one another in the face of such a question? The answer is that only those who chose to ask the question itself are able to truly relate to each other. Complacency breeds ignorance, but questioning can bring enlightenment. Often painful enlightenment, but enlightenment nonetheless. And the true importance of asking "What is reality?" *is not finding an answer, but being able to ask the question in itself.*

Setting: The setting of the show provides the classic backdrop for a horror thriller: an old musty house, with plenty of dark open spaces. We are privy to only the dinner room, which though decorated in fine Victorian props still appears downright spooky. The costumes and time period, though they could be manipulated, remain intact. It appears to be the mid-1930s, where Eliot

form of a murderer, a lonely young woman, and a woman wrestling with her past demons. They are held up in the show as the “heroes”, suppose “anti-heroes” would work better here, just as they would be in Zen Buddhism, since they are willing to question and are better for it.

La Cage Aux Folles– Playhouse Theatre, 1/10/2009

was highly effective in drawing the viewer in via visceral involvement, thus able to great witness the spectacle unfolding before them.

Additionally, the show was incredibly funny, both in dialogue and situation. However, this also would not be possible without some kind of tension, and therein lies the underlying message of the show: acceptance.

This message of acceptance can be found in two forms: both self-assurance and acceptance of others, particularly one's own family. The self-assurance aspect comes in the form of Albin's powerful song at the end of Act I, which comes after he is ridiculed for who he is: a homosexual drag queen. But he comes to the conclusion that one must be one's self and comfortable in one's own skin, regardless of how the outside world may treat you.

The acceptance of others, especially family, can be seen in Albin and Georges' adopted son finally accepting and standing up for Albin even in the face of his possible father-in-law, thus jeopardizing his own marriage in order to stand up for his family, when at first he tried to hide the facts. It all worked out in the end, with even the future father-in-law reluctantly accepting the circumstances and lifestyle of his new family.

In other words, the spectacle, while grand and entertaining, is merely just a way of delivering the message that acceptance of the self and others is a paramount virtue among human beings.

Personal Musings: This was a fantastic show! I admit full ignorance of the show's actual theme and content before going in, except for the fact that I knew it was famous. It was nice to

Complicit – Old Vic Theatre, 1/10/2009

Overall Synopsis and Director's Vision: The vision for *Complicit* was to present a very modern, controversial, and divisive topic within American and world society, but examined from the perspective of a single individual. While we often look at the large issues of September 11th and the subsequent use of torture from a remote perspective, this show attempted to put a human face and emotions on an individual involved in the process, in the form of writer Ben Kritzner. The show covers his fear, his anguished feelings of responsibility to country, family, and personal ideals alike, and most of all, guilt. Thus, the show is about putting human emotions onto larger events a process which itself makes a profound anti-torture argument by trying to put a human face on the victims, regardless of whether they be guilty or not.

The show makes no qualms about its stance on the issue of torture, as the show's program itself contains a trove of information regarding the Geneva Convention.

Setting: This was by far one of the most dynamic sets we have seen thus far, and from our vantage point in the balcony, we actually feel we had the best view of what was going on. The set was inundated with TVs, both large and small, under the clear plexiglass stage as well as above it. These TVs, in addition to being a commentary in themselves on the massive amount of media coverage on the events being discussed, were able to provide rather startling and unnerving scene changes, and to show the aforementioned pre-recorded TV interviews with Kritzner. The interviews themselves were of particular note, since many times certain phrases and words, many of them disturbing, were repeated, as though there was a glitch in the programming. It was a clear desire at trying to insert a clear message about the brutality of the torture itself; the fact that such brutality can be discussed almost casually within an interview is part of the statement that we have become removed from the issues at hand, making it impossible to insert the human element. This is the whole point of this show.

Audience and Intention: The whole show revolves around the specter of the 9/11 attacks and the use of torture afterwards. However, it deals with the tribulations of a single man, Kritzner, and his personal actions to the events at hand. The point is to humanize what are unfortunately events which often lack a human face, therefore making them hard most to relate to on a personal level.

At the end of the show, we learn of Kritzner's role in the wake of 9/11, which led him to pen what became a famous article, which seems to support the use of torture. This is an event he greatly regrets as time passes. We also see him in the form of being tried by the United States government itself for the crime of leaking sensitive government information given to him by a source.

However, the reason for his subsequent publishi

are of particular and engrossing importance to many Americans, often dividing great numbers of people into opposing camps. In fact, the show was so new that we actually still technically saw it during its final rehearsal phase: the fourth in a series of four. This was the only show in which we were able to witness part of the rehearsal phase, mistakes and slips in all. We essentially got to see the masters at work, using craft to create an end product, and we were witness to this process. It was very interesting.

I was greatly impressed with the dynamic use of the way media was utilized: for a show about an issue which has been covered by actual media to such an extent, it made sense to incorporate said media into the show itself in the form of pre-filmed dialogues.

All in all, I am incredibly glad that I chose to see this optional show. Yes, it did interfere with my packing for home, but it was so worth it.

seen on this trip. Even when not the central theme, the concept is still there and given a unique treatment by each show.

Why is this the case? Why would "family" be a theme found in all the shows? The answer is that it can be found in all lives. Once again, even those without family are dealing with the absence of family. It is a concept with which every human being deals with, almost on a daily basis. If creation is reflective of the artist, no matter how abstract the piece, be it a play, song, or picture, then some element of this will show through in the piece. Every human being deals with the concept of family during at least one point in their lives and it is only natural that the idea family be present in every one we've seen. Family is omnipresent.

On a Personal Note

This trip proved to be one of the greatest things I have ever done in my life. That statement is not an exaggeration in any sense of the word; if anything, it is an understatement. Without going into too much detail, the trip came at a time when I really needed it. Not only was it incredibly fun (something which I had not experienced in a while due to a variety of circumstances), but I was able to prove my independence in the wake of the health issues which currently have me sidelined during this Spring Semester.

I came into this trip not knowing a single participant, and I left with so many new friends; friends who I remain in daily contact with and see whenever I am in Rochester. I