

Student Responses—Theatre in England 2014

To receive credit for the Theatre in England course, students complete either a journal (comprised of daily entries commenting on each play) or a take-home exam (comprised of questions asking students to draw thematic, theatrical, and production connections between plays). Below is a sampling of student responses from the 2014 trip.

Jack and the Beanstalk

Jack and the Beanstalk was an interesting way to start this course, as it utilized a form of theatre not prevalent in the United States: pantomime, or panto for short. This form takes well-known folktales and stories and adds a sense of comedic irreverence to them, bending the famous stories to add in musicality, cross-dressing, humor, and many other theatrical—although not necessarily fancy—elements. Panto is also unmistakably participatory, an experience that is fairly unique in theatre.

Julia Sklar

With *Jack and the Beanstalk*'s almost nonexistent fourth wall, imagination was frequently invoked to make up for apparent budget limitations (Jill's climbing a rope to represent the beanstalk), and to both involve the audience in the action (the idea that the audience's urging to 'keep on sprouting' would give Sprout the strength to go on and to use his magical green thumb), while at the same time imagination could be reversed for comic effect (when Sprout reminds the trickster Fox that 'you're just a girl in a fox suit from Tesco!'). The panto reminds us at every turn that, while the actors enjoy their work, the production is for the benefit of the audience and not in service of a fantasy world with motivations particular to the characters; thus imagination brings us into their world, but is also frequently done away with for comic effect or for the benefit of audience participation.

Mark Patch

In *Jack and the Beanstalk* Sprout and Jack introduce the audience to a fanciful world where giants torture the town. The really imaginative part of the show comes in on the audience's interaction. The giant is almost never seen, and when he is it is only his face for a brief moment. This allows the audience to imagine him as significantly more frightening than he actually is by placing their own fears into him, thus making Jack's bravery all the more impressive. The audience's engagement allows the show to expand far beyond the normal boundaries of participation and helps pull the audience in. This allows the show to tailor to all the different ages that are watching. Children can imagine an ugly monster. Adolescents can start to comprehend that the monster may not be scary just because he is one ugly monster but because his existence suggests others and a whole world of frightening creatures. Adults will start to interpret the lack of a physical source of evil as the omnipresence of evil in this world. The level of engagement by imagination helps the audience imagine Jack's world not just as Jack's but as their own. Thus, the frightening elements of the giant carry over into the audience's real life by how engaged the audience is.

Kara Allen

Jack and the Beanstalk broke the fourth wall as the actors interacted with the audience, sometimes asking us to become involved physically as they did in *Stomp*, sometimes by literally bringing audience members up on stage. The character Maureen invited a University of Rochester student on stage to do Zumba together. Even after the student sat back down, Maureen continued to give this student humorously seductive looks and made reference to bringing that student back on stage several more times or made reference to looking good for that student.

This performance relied just as much on the audience as it did on the cast and the cast did well in reaching out to everybody to make this show successful; at some points the action from the audience was greater than that seen on stage as children threw their fists in the air supporting the protagonists and intimidating the villains. Throughout the panto, cast members asked the audience to “Boo!” at the villain Flesh-creep, or encourage Sprout by chanting, “Just keep sprouting!” The children in the audience progressively offered more of their cheers, boos, and words of wisdom without prompt; the audience naturally began to interact beyond instruction.

Sprout further engaged the children by tossing candy to the audience, sometimes aggressively with a tennis racket, mocking himself for smashing kids’ faces with candy moments after; the act of breaking character added an additional connection to the audience beyond the act of simply giving them candy.

Older audience members cheered and chanted alongside the younger ones, while slyly laughing at hidden adult humor. Continuing to break character, Sprout, who was making silly sexual references with a drum kit, murmured through his quiet giggles, “I can’t do this,” laughing at himself, mocking what he was doing as an actor because he was being so ridiculous.

By the end of the performance, the audience was laughing and cheering, and the cast was

Mooney informs Mother Thomas that she wants to remain in Catholic school in order to become a nun herself. This surprising statement supported by the mental resilience of Mary Mooney seemed to capture the heart of Mother Thomas to the point that she is on the verge of tears, especially so in her case since Mother Thomas had just consulted the brash Mary McGinty. In this way, it was observable that Mary Mooney's actions and endurance caused others to change around her, such as the reactions of Mother Thomas or the engagement of her friend, Mary McGinty and Derek the sexual assaulter.

Yuji Wakimoto

Once a Catholic accentuates its theatricality to serve a twofold purpose. First, the show aims to demonstrate the theatrical nature of the Catholic Church itself in emphasizing its rigid, ritualized structure

American Psycho

word 'schism' could refer to multiple aspects of the musical. First, there is the divide between *American Psycho's* businessmen (and women) and the less privileged characters such as Jean and the homeless person. The financial separation between these groups fosters the derision that incites Bateman to his first murder. When he interacts with the homeless man, Bateman berates him for his lack of initiative and laziness, attributing his homelessness to a lack of hard work. This scene and the following murder comment on the violence and metaphorical cannibalism of a capitalistic system.

Second, there is also a schism between Patrick Bateman and the rest of the world, including his privileged friends. He tries to communicate with his companions, but they seem to mishear him. For example, when Bateman mentions that he works in “murders and executions,” the woman hears “mergers and acquisitions.” He also confesses his crimes to the detective, who then interprets his voicemail as a joke. He even tells Evelyn repeatedly that he is a murderer and

speedily flashed changing numbers, symbolizing the looming threat to the characters and providing a source of tension for the audience.

Integral to the set through bleacher-like seating, the audience symbolized a threatening presence to the characters on another level. The audience reflected the role of the public and the press, constantly watching and criticizing and scrutinizing organizations like “Disaster Relief.”

Molly Nemer

Fault Lines takes a novel approach in portraying the helplessness of individuals. In such a small performance space, the viewer quickly become acquainted with the characters in a very intimate fashion, particularly with Abi, a main character who is almost naked in Scene One. The lack of curtains and the use of seating in a round let the audience observe very intricate details about the characters’ habits and lives. Nothing can be hidden, not even what they are typing on the computer. However, the main source of conflict, the terrorists in Pakistan and the natural disasters, occur in the space beyond what the audience can see. We maintain glimpses through the television screen or one-sided phone calls, but the majority of it is completely hidden from view. The removal of this conflict creates a profound sense of helplessness within the characters, as we witness them trying to combat a kind of invisible force. Our imaginations allow us to interpret the source of conflict in a powerful and unstoppable environment. The characters within the office become trapped by it, forced to run around in circles without really removing or combating any of this ‘invisible’ force. It becomes an unsettling experience, making the characters appear as small individuals, helpless to change something that they cannot even see in the first place.

Elizabeth Riedman

Drawing the Line

In *Drawing The Line*, the main character, Radcliffe, has to draw the border between India and the new nation of Pakistan. This impossible task is one that Radcliffe tries his best to remain impartial at, though there are Muslim supporters and Hindu supporters trying to sway his

piece. In addition, the play's driving force, money, remains invisible (or "imaginary") throughout, allowing the audience to focus on effect and overall concept rather than cause. The scene during which the characters confess "their" sins at a Salvation Army meeting suggests that

audience, I was very impressed. I think it represented time and death. It was where the clock was first projected and was is where the “Death” character came from the first and last time we saw it. It was constantly looming over the stage, the actors, and most of the audience. Finally, it was where the clerk died. His death had been close by the entire play, whether he realized it or not.

Lindsey Nadler

Swan Lake

It was interesting to see this adaptation of *Swan Lake* on the same day as *From Morning to Midnight*

dancing and engaging the white swan at the lake, and in the final scenes the white swan is seen as a rescuing figure while the prince is being attacked by the other swans. However, the destructive elements of the imaginings take form in the black swan, who elegantly appeared in the ballroom dance scene. One common characteristic of the destructive fantasy is that the destruction happened once the fantasy became a tangible element to the real world as the black

viewer's mind. The music in *Elephantom* used many instruments for different moments in the play. The use of drums showed the hecticness that the phantom elephant created. The musicians even sang two songs a cappella, imitating a bass and trumpets with their voices. This represented the elephant's trunk sound and footsteps. All of these techniques allow the viewer to be engaged in the story, no matter what age they are.

Dan Slavin

Collins's

The Wind in the Willows

The production of The Wind in the Willows that we saw was based upon Kenneth Grahame's classic 1908 children's book and featured a "Kenneth Grahame" character/narrator as well as actors dressed in 1900's clothing with minimal details (e.g. ears and tails) indicating their animal identities.

The main characters in *The Wind in the Willows* do not talk throughout the play. The animals are silent unless they are part of the musical components of the play, and instead of words they rely on movement and ballet-like dancing to construct the narrative and move the story forward. The only character that is heard talking consistently throughout the play is the narrating figure, who also happens

Fuerzabruta forced the audience into a situation of chaos. The audience participated actively in the performance, abandoning reality upon entering the set. Although the crowd became more concretely a part of the act than in *Fault Lines*, the audience was put in a space of wonder with nothing physically concrete to ground them. The set was just as alive as the actors in it.

Seemingly invisible forces herded the audience around in a circular and ever changing environment to allow the set room to change; personal space gave way as the set constantly morphed with additions and subtractions, performers moving quickly from one space to another through an onslaught of disorienting lights, flashing and changing colors. There was no sense of front, back, top, bottom, left, right — a prelude to a performance that did not necessarily intend to make sense.

Perceptions became instantly warped; in addition to the ever-changing physicality of the stage, time became warped as well. The entire performance, literally a whirlwind around and

Dorothea allowed her imagination uncontrolled access to her decision-making and evaluation of her life. Dorothea falls in love with Casaubon thinking that he has more to give her than he already had, when really she only imagining him as she wanted him to be. This is an example of when imagination is injurious and results in her life not being as she wanted it. After her first husband dies, the audience sees her about to make the same mistake again with Will for whom she is willing to give up her wealth. Clearly she romanticized what her life was to be with her young suitor but she did not give full consideration to the reality of the situation as demonstrated by her statement of being poor meant "no more new clothes" and that she would "learn the prices of things."

Sophia Catalano

We saw a number of plays presented in theatres in the round, and each one handled and utilized the setup slightly differently. In *Dorothea's Story*, the arrangement worked to play off the fact that this interpretation of the story showed Dorothea's perspective through the eyes of the other characters. In contrast to the single narrator in *1(pe)-TJ 0 -1.1 cind-2t3(e2t)-2(h, 1 ("l)3i)-2(e)4*

Not I, Footfalls, and Rockaby

This production consisted of three rarely-performed short plays (or really monologues) by Samuel Beckett. The plays, all performed by a single actress, are thematically linked, particularly in regard to language-use, identity, and death.

The Beckett trilogy, consisting of *Not I*, *Footfalls*, and *Rockaby*, made use of both verbal and non-verbal language. Traditionally, for Beckett, the text itself was often enough. For Beckett, what seemed to be more important than *what* was being spoken, was the style in which it was spoken (*how*). *Not I* is all about verbal language. Its rapid, fragmented, and mostly monotone “stream of consciousness” speech is performed at the speed of thought. The lady, who talks of being unable to communicate in verbal language throughout her life, seems to be spilling them all out now in some type of purgatory/afterlife state. The words she speaks are at too rapid of a pace to comprehend, which conveys to us that she finally has a chance (under time pressure) to communicate to an audience the thoughts that she held inside for so long, for a lifetime of silence. This “language” in a sense, although presently verbal, represents a potential shortcoming of the use of words; that words often fail to represent inward realities. The character’s speech is uncontrollable, yet the actress’s speech is perfectly controlled; a contrast that represents a sort of tension and release. The language, though rapid, is rhythmic. We do catch bits and pieces of what is being said. Perhaps this is because people could only *partially* understand her during her lifetime. Both the actress and the audience alike suffer from sensory deprivation, from only being able to see a pinhole of the mouth in the darkness; a light/dark visual contrast that is daunting, anxiety-provoking, and makes us uncomfortable. But that is what she is trying to convey—the rapid-paced monologue, the red (symbolizing blood?) lips in the darkness, is all a perfectly tied-together “language” for the audience to get a general sense of her painful and miserable life on earth. Her laughs, screams, and occasional pauses provide us with some relief from feeling “choked”. We can also consider here the powerful ambiguity of the third-person language; is the lady referring to herself or someone else? Another element of the language is repetition. For example, the words “godforsaken hole” are repeated throughout the monologue—first to convey for us an image of her mother’s vagina—since the lady felt no lov.81t ln ho2(i)-2(on.(e)4(pe)12(y)20(b)-0(ct)]us

take a part in the overall “language” of the production, the mother and daughter seem to be one and the same.

In *Rockaby*, the mechanized rhythm of the rocking chair, which seems to rock by itself, is similar to language of the nine-step metronome in *Footfalls* that conveys the message that time is running out, just as the mouth in

time as a sort of omniscient surveyor of life after his death, as well as a reminder for the audience of that which controls the play. Upon closer inspection, one may note that Ezra does not only exert his influence on the characters posthumously. His abusive relationship with his son, Baby, most likely motivates Baby's psychotic behavior observed throughout the play. *Mojo* reveals the power of a single individual to impact others indefinitely.

Grade Lisandrelli

In *Mojo*, one sees very strong artistic conventions being pushed. The play is extremely vulgar, from the language, to the subject matter, to the drug use. The F-word and the C-word are dropped numerous times through the production with every character using them almost equally. Furthermore, whereas many plots are driven by actual, concrete events, in *Mojo*, the plot is driven by the visceral emotional reactions of the characters to one another. Finally, the artistic conventions regarding what we can and cannot see represented onstage were shattered when Luke is shot in the head and bleeds to death before our eyes: the character does not stumble into the wings or get dragged quickly off: rather, we watch as pints of blood pour out of his head.

Danny Mensel

Mojo is set up in two distinct acts that stand in opposition to one another in terms of the level of distress present. The play opens with a thumping bass line, a charismatic, young male rock star bouncing around with excited energy, and the anticipatory screams of waiting fans; from there, the plot descends into relative chaos, in conjunction with the literal descent of the set. In this sense, the set reflects the inner workings of the story, rather than just acting as a prop for the action in the play.

The first act takes place entirely on what is obviously the top floor of an establishment, for the top of the downward staircase can be seen. The surroundings are very clearly an office or an administrative area of some kind—there's a desk and stacked paperwork—but the presence of a jukebox makes it clear that this isn't a staunch, tight-laced setting. The first downward movement that takes place in the play is the young rock star, Silver Johnny, jumping down into the staircase in the opening scene. That he should be the first character to “descend” is ultimately prophetic, as he is later revealed to be passively central to the deaths of Ezra, Sam Ross, and Skinny Luke, the three catastrophic events that move the otherwise waiting-heavy plot forward.

The rest of the play follows suit similarly. Upstairs is where childish, raucous behavior takes place when the characters are literally elevated, hovering metaphorically above reality and responsibility. That isn't to say that the scenes that take place upstairs are necessarily lighthearted and joyous; they do contain a dark sense of humor, but nothing is quite real. At one point, immature chaos breaks loose, and Skinny Luke is tied to the jukebox with his pants off, Baby is shirtless and wielding a samurai sword, Sweets is standing on top of the desk—stomping on the only symbol of weighted responsibility in the room—with a lamp protecting his face, and running around aimlessly. This is in contrast to the chaos that later breaks loose downstairs, which is much darker and more real.

As the cast descends in the second act to the bottom floor of the set, it's as if they are falling into reality, adulthood, and responsibility. It is there that Baby first mentions wanting a leadership role in the club, expressing the interest to take after his dad; it is also here that we are first introduced to Ezra's severed body, although we never actually see it; and it is also here where the real, irreversibly tragic chaos takes place, as Baby shoots and kills Skinny Luke, and Mickey ends up with Skinny Luke's blood literally on his hands. By moving the cast and plot of

video-enabled baby monitor. Jonah can watch Sophie, Sophie knows she's being watched, but Sophie can't watch Jonah back, at least not through the baby monitor. Sophie has the advantage of knowing that Jonah lives beneath her, so she can watch him outside her window. Despite that their relationship is predicated on such visibility, a type of vulnerability and openness that tends to yield good results for a relationship, theirs ultimately falls apart, an interesting twist on the plot of a self-proclaimed "love story."

Visibility also functions in how the characters interact with the audience. At first it manifests through words. The story opens with both of the characters opening up to us about their pasts, their families, upbringings, etc. They share a number of telling and personal anecdotes about themselves. So, although in this stage they haven't actually shown us anything or been seen by anyone, they are making their stories visible. It's unusual to get that much information about a character at the outset of a play; usually, one has to wait ieldt ieldt ieldun3(orm2(h of)3(ti)4

Candide

We saw a unique performance of the Bernstein operetta of Voltaire's Candide, about a naïve young man who suffers a series of misadventures as he seeks "the best of all possible worlds."

Candide is derived from an action-packed novella by Voltaire and some of the occurrences are impossible to stage. For example, there is an earthquake and multiple hangings in the book that are also in the operetta. Since it is impossible to portray these instances accurately, the production opeinstaio por2(a)4(nc)k(a)4(1)-10(ex)hum(or)-11du

sharp and aggressive. Innovation and rebellion among children as a positive feature is a common theme in much of Roald Dahl's work.

Taylor McCabe

STOMP

Similarly to *Elephantom*, *Stomp* was a performance that did not use any words. However, there were vocal sounds being made to show acknowledgement, anger and laughter. Going in to the performance, I believed it was going to be more like a cabaret of different musical pieces, so I was pleasantly surprised when there was a bit of a story and there was character development. There was a leader, a silly character, and a character that was treated like the low man on the totem pole. Without words, the cast developed these characters through their actions and hand gestures. The audience responded similarly to how they would any other performance. They were engaged, and they participated when the cast prompted them to. This shows that words are not necessary elements in storytelling, or in appreciation of a performance.

Dan Slavin

Stomp's movement gives a sense of camaraderie among the performers. The non-verbal communication does not seem to stem from an inadequacy of words, but from an exploration of different types of language. Just as the performers turn everyday objects into percussion instruments, they challenge expectations about language by telling a narrative without words. Despite a lack of conversation, it is clear that one of the performers is not accepted by the rest and tries to prove himself in order to fit in. The actors tell this story just by their facial expressions and body movements, using different instruments of communication like they improvised their musical instruments.

Katherine Briant

In *Stomp*, we were not only allowed to have a voice, we were encouraged to. The audience was necessary in creating some of the noise that filled the theater. We became part of the sounds and the sounds were the essence of this production. There were call and response-like interactions between audience and performer where one of the "stompers" clapped twice at the audience and we knew instinctively to clap twice back. The "stomper" would clap faster, perhaps adding another element to the pattern, and the audience knew to do the same in turn. Sometimes the performers "tricked" the audience by building to really fast, relatively complicated patterns beyond our abilities and they would smirk and laugh at us a bit. They would wave their hands towards the audience, dismissing us as "non-stompers," reminding us of their superior talent. Not only did they get us to participate, but they actually interacted with us. This interaction added interest to what could have been a monotonous performance.

The audience got to know the members of the *Stomp* team as individuals, each with a different and distinct personality. The cast member who was tall, lanky, awkward, and offbeat (not in a literal sense), often looked at the audience and shrugged his shoulders when he acted in ways that showed he was on a different page than the other performers. He acknowledged us as a presence and we saw through bashful head turns that he was sometimes almost embarrassed that we witnessed his shortcomings.

Molly Nemer

Similarly to *Elephanto*