

Theatre in London 2011-2012 Journal: A Journey through the Mind

An Introductory Note:

I realized about halfway through my writing this journal that many of my entries dealt with an emerging interest: the mind and cognition as it is represented in literary arts. So, I deliberately focused the second half of my journal on such themes. Nearly all of the entries discuss some aspect of cognition, sometimes including ways in which we, as the audience, might make sense of the spectacle occurring onstage. My topics range widely across such subjects as vision & perception, belief vs. doubt, judgment, expectation, motive, consciousness, subjectivity & identity formation, imagination & narration, language, reading, & interpretation; memory, empathy, madness, o
these plays from a subjective point of view, keeping in mind that they all portray characters who

two definitions of trial become inseparable. For us, the question of truth becomes inextricable from who is good or bad, who we *want* to believe. But it is unclear which of the characters

using live animals (in the film) lacked.

Afterwards, we followed Dr. Peck on a trek through central London to our second

gestures to it

for this scene. This allows the glass of the darkened window to serve as a reflecting surface. Thus, when Hamlet reflection. When it is clear that Gertrude cannot hear this conversation, Hamlet begins to suspect his own sanity as we have from the beginning.

The shocking second act featured not only the deaths and resurrections of key characters like own hand, literally rises from the ground to reappear as a bloodied priest who officiates physical resemblance between Polonius and this priest. None of the other characters seem to notice that one of their company has a gaping wound in his side. Ophelia, whose death can also be attributed more indirectly to first, as the messenger who informs

duel. Again, only Hamlet seems to notice. The effect of these unexpected resurrections is to empha Despite his reluctance to renounce his plan to kill Claudius, he feels responsible for the deaths of innocents. It also suggests his instability, since the other characters who interact with these characters (the priest and the foil-bearer) act normally implying that these two characters are not, in actuality, the risen dead. Rather, Hamlet projects his guilt over their deaths onto others.

That Hamlet himself dies in the end, but reappears as the unmasked Fortinbras (in a

hints scattered throughout the production that we're not seeing things quite as they are, we don't (or I didn't) fully realize how utterly we'd been immersed into Hamlet's mind until the final act when the dead and buried Ophelia suddenly emerges from her sandy grave. But that moment of epiphany was searing in its force and clarity. Suddenly, everything made sense. And this gradual, incremental, and confusing descent suggests the very nature of madness itself: one does not realize how compromised his mind is until, suddenly, others can't see what he can. Thus, Rickson's playing with perspectives allows us a glimpse into what Hamlet saw and felt, demonstrating what it feels like to go mad.

So how can we make sense of the final scene? Even if we accept that this coup is how can he be doubly present as both a corpse and the conqueror, Fortinbras? On one level, it points back to his schizophrenia, suggesting that Hamlet has overcome one version of himself, the one who feels anxiety over killing Claudius. The Hamlet who experienced guilt or remorse for committing murder is gone. Perhaps he needed the revenge to give closure to that tumultuous chapter of his life. Perhaps the arrival of Fortinbras

with Holmes has come in the form of BBC's brilliant new miniseries, *Sherlock* (which incidentally aired its second season during our stay in London). Thus, I had in mind Sherlock's spacious suite from the show. But the flat at 221b Baker Street is actually very cramped. We were forced to queue up outside the house for nearly a half-hour because the staircase is so

Noel

a much-needed

as a man, rather than any of his explicitly divine aspects (indeed, in his only clear mention of concentrates on the concept of Christ as Logos, the Word, and thus as a divine being. But McPherson presents John as a man scarred by his life experiences and obsessively considering and reconsidering them in his mind, while Mark seems trapped by words own. Although he seems reluctant to sit down and share a drink with his employer, he cannot

Graham Linehan *The Ladykillers* (2011)
Adapted from the play by William Rose
Director Sean Foley
Gielgud Theatre

Much of *The Ladykillers'* phenomenal humor was, I think, due to the heavily stereotypical characters. Recognizable stereotypes like the prim and proper British lady, the psychotic mastermind, the gangster, the mentally slow black man set up certain expectations in our heads and seemed to lessen their force as three-dimensional characters and somewhat reduce them almost into caricatures of realistic characters. But I do not mean in any way to degrade the play; rather, I think the effect that these reductive, cartoon-like characters have on the audience is to simultaneously distance the characters emotionally from the audience and make the entirety of the play more

criminal activities is evidenced in her incessant insistence on serving them tea, we recognize her as a British stereotype and cannot help but be somewhat amused by her patronizing generosity,

Juno and the Paycock (1923)

Sunday, January 1, 2012

Director Howard Davies**Lyttleton Theatre**

I dragged myself out of bed this morning to meet Dr. Peck and number of students on our trek to many years, so it was a remarkable experience. For me, much of the thrill was simply in stepping upon the same stones that my literary hero Chaucer had trodden over 500 years ago! I was overwhelmed by the majesty of the abbey, its soaring towers, its stained glass windows illuminated by morning light, its weighty sense of history. Our pews, in the section reserved for in the thick of the music. And, for me, this was the most moving part of the service. Although I am by no means a religious person, I can see the appeal of church-going. The hymns pulsed with a subdued but palpable passion, often underscored by long passages of melismatic brilliance. The four-part sections in the choir often sang simple melodies in repeated rounds which became mesmerizing in their rhythm. The singers layered and wove their voices together so seamlessly and intricately that I could not help but stand in awe at what beauty the human voice can create. Afterwards, a few of us stayed in the Westminster ar walking over Waterloo Bridge to our first show at the Lyttleton in the National Theater.

I would like to reflect briefly on the significance of *Juno and the Paycock*

The Classical story that the title refers to (in its earliest rendition) is a fragmentary poem entitled *Aigimios* by Hesiod. In it, the queen of the heavens Hera assigns her favorite guard the hundred- to guard the nymph Io again

then slays him by stoning. Later, Hera honors her faithful guardsman by having his eyes emblazoned on the tail of her avatar, the peacock. (Meanwhile, Io is raped by Zeus and bears him two children, both of whom either become or give birth to founders of their own cities.)

he peacock is mentioned several

Juno shows some parallels with the Classical goddess, I would like to focus on the idea of Argus

of George VI in the *King's Speech*. At the National Gallery, my favorites included the Impressionists and the Rubens collection, which I viewed last. I also enjoyed seeing the unfinished Manchester Michelangelo, which affords his audience a rare
ds, we had an opulent dinner at the Café
in the Crypt
in the Fields. It was very crowded because many patrons were getting dinner before the feature concert (I think it was a Dvorak), and we ended up chatting with a British couple who shared our table. Then, we headed to an evening show which quickly and rightly became a favorite.

In *Jerusalem*

mythic themes, the

home, but also of its people. It is significant that our first sight of the play – the stage curtain emblazoned with a vivid red cross – is the symbol of Saint George himself (Redcrosse Knight). Also significant, I think, is the fact that the first character we see, Phaedra, steps out in front of this iconic symbol (rather than having the curtain lifted to reveal her). That she – the lost child most in need of protection – is silhouetted against the enormous red cross emphasizes the way in which Rooster hovers protectively over all. Of course, Saint

hope, , rocking ⁴ The lights fade out and the play ends there, leaving the audience with a wondrous sense that magic could indeed return to England, even in this jaded age.

Jerusalem begins with the fairy figure of Phaedra singing its opening stanzas. While the song was unfamiliar to me, I imagine that every Londoner in the adapted by the British Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges, and Sir Hubert Parry into an anthem meant to inspire demoralized British troops in WWI. It proved so popular that it was later adopted by the Anglican Church as a hymn, and is still frequently sung in public schools. Its doubled status as both a secular anthem (often called the unofficial anthem of England) and a hymn makes *Jerusalem* as distinctly and holistically English as can be, and notably as Rooster is. Thus, it is worth looking at the lyrics:

And did those feet in ancient time,
Walk upon England's mountains green;
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire;
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:

⁴ I cannot neglect saying a few words about Mark Rylance's deeply affecting performance as Rooster. He embodied the brash, tall tale-telling, anti-establishment wastrel to perfection, but also invested his character with a surprising level of vulnerability and human dignity. Although Rooster does not resemble any kind of traditional hero, he was utterly convincing; one cannot help but root for him in his crusade against the insidious New Estate. Rylance somehow manages to balance the larger-than-life attributes of the mythic figures I cite here with Rooster's very apparent human foibles. I (and everyone else I've talked to) was moved to tears by the final scene, where Rylance pours out his very soul in one of the most raw, heartbreaking performances I've ever seen. It sounds clichéd, but my heart was in my throat during the entire final sequence, and I got chills when I heard the rumbling response to Rooster's impassioned cries. When the lights went out, the audience (rightly) erupted into applause, commending Rylance for an incredibly moving performance.

Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land.

At the beginning of the show, Phaedra in her sweet soprano sings the first two stanzas directly to us before she is interrupted by the thundering rave music of a raging party, hosted by Rooster. The hymn itself narrates the coming of Jesus to England, which He has selected as the site of the New Jerusalem the seat of the kingdom of Heaven. Blake displays a sense of wonder

because it spreads infectiously, without any regard for human life or Nature, and worships only money. Even though Phaedra is interrupted before she can finish the song, the audience (presumably) knows the remainder by heart and has it in mind as the play begins.

By the end of the play, when Rooster has been abandoned by or deliberately driven away

to destroy him. I read his sending away of all his disciples as, again, a protective act; he prevents their risking their

himself to face his enemies alone, as is the prerogative and the curse of such a consummate guardian. Thus, one can easily imagine Rooster intoning the last two stanzas of the hymn like some shining archangel warrior calling for his weapons to fight for and build the New Jerusalem, to resur

Reasons to be Pretty (2008)

Tuesday, January 3

Director Michael Attenborough
Almeida Theatre

Even though there was a free lunchtime concert playing at St. Martins in the Field, I opted to stay

r Animals and Children Took to the Streets, so I only had one play today and was able to get some much-needed sleep. Jay, Katie, Kieran, and I arrived in the Islington area early to have dinner. We sat down at a very good

Indian restaurant, but had to rush in order to make it to our show. We ran to the Almeida theater just in time, though we had to stash our takeaway boxes in our various bags and purses.

Reasons to be Pretty is less about beauty than issues of language and expression.

does not find her physically attractive or that she is not conventionally beautiful, but that both are unable to express exactly what they mean to each other. In the opening s perceived insult launches her into a spate of obscenity. Her rage so overrides her reason that she cannot express herself verbally by any other means than by cursing at Greg. What she seems to want is an admission of guilt and an apology, neither of which Greg gives her willingly. On a deeper level, she wants him to understand how deeply his remark has hurt her. However, the enormity of her anger prevents her from articulating herself in a comprehensible way; unable to elicit a full confession or an apology, she deflects her intent into sheer hostility. In fact, the only way she seems able to fully express her frustration is non-verbally (Later, she is able to express herself somewhat more rationally, when she prepares a written list

effectiveness of her language, reducing it into cursing. Greg is right when he accuses her of irrationality.

Yet simultaneously, Greg does not present himself as a ready recipient for her message. He hems and haws and waffles around the issue, trying to deny that what he said was meant in a hurtful w

es not seem to hold physical beauty as the ultimate basis for a romantic relationship, nor does he always speak with complete sincerity. He certainly values the truth of words more highly than his best friend, Kent, does; but he seems more eager to avoid conflict with the volatile Kent than to willingly wear his heart on his sleeve. While the two-faced Kent openly lies to his fiancée and then laughs about it with Greg, Greg at least attempts not to say anything blatantly false. Of all the characters in the play, Greg is most apparently concerned with the expressive power of language; during his night shift, he reads Swift, Hawthorne, and Irving and during confrontation seems to be the one most able to

keep his cool. But even he is unable to say the one thing that Steph most needs to hear that she is beautiful to him. Perhaps this is because he does not put such great store in beauty; to him, what is more important is that he loves her, regardless of how she looks. Yet, he seems unable to put these two crucial ideas into words, or at least, into words that Steph understands and accepts.

Royal Shakespeare Theater; it dawned upon me that we were seeing the renowned RSC in its birthplace of Stratford, and I stood frozen in awe for a moment.

Measure for Measure was

the moral backbone to enforce the laws and take the blame for tyranny. When proper order is restored, Vincentio implies, he will return to reassume the mantle of dukedom.

him as somewhat childlike, rather than the just father he should be to his people. His aversion to responsibility, need to be liked, and trickster qualities all seem to liken the duke to a mischievous child. Indeed, in his subversion of his own authority (by putting Angelo in charge and donning the habit of a friar), Vincentio seems more invested in a Bakhtinian spirit of the carnivalesque, inverting traditional hierarchies of order. He is full of contradictions – a duke who resigns his power, a father figure who acts like a child, a friar who masterminds the bed trick. And all of these contradictory identities are reconciled in his recurring role as the magician-trickster, a persona whose very trade is in forgery, slipping between identities, as an entity which inhabits an in-between transitional space and questions the very notion of essence.

The disguise of the Friar is thus a perfect one for Vincentio, because it allows him access everywhere

Friar also allows Vincentio to carry out his stated mission, as a spy⁵ on his own people:

Supply me with the habit and instruct me
 How I may formally in person bear me
 Like a true friar. More reasons for this action

of a humble friar. The tricks and substitutions he creates double as tests of character, disclosing the truth through deception. For example, the bed trick he conjures up for Isabella proves not

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s ruthlessness

response that Edgar had designed to help manifest a central theme in his play: that all acts of reading of meaning-making, parsing symbols, interpreting are fraught with difficulty,

cannot understand. In order to thwart a conjurer, does one have to be a conjurer himself? The

Catholic Church their vener

Word he seems like a conjurer himself. For an audience who presumably is fluent in neither

to recast it into either another form of gibberish or into a form that is understandable to the audience.

supposed to leave his prisoner alone with any visitor, does so willingly for a coin from the priest. The implication is that he senses their subterfuge, but willingly turns a blind eye. Thus, he prefigures the non-believers

but deliberately feigns ignorance. It seems, then, that

Both men realize the extent to which they have been deceived or, perhaps, the extent to which

could not be contained, and projected itself into what is essentially another self that Andrewes can converse with to work through his guilt. In this fantasy, Andrewes imagines himself as the opposite of Tyndale. If Tyndale is the passionate zealot, steadfast and certain, Andrewes is uncertain, the voice of compromise, trying to take the middle ground to ensure peace. While

changes that Tyndale makes and notes them down as Tyndale dictates. We must remember,

Richard is heirless, one might also consider his mothering of the land as a way for him to imagine a substitute child and compensate for his failure as a fertile king. Or, one might take a

t wound thee with their

Richard only understands himself in relation his crown or his land; he can only conceive of himself in positions of power. When both the crown and land are taken from him, he loses his sense of identity. This is later made manifest in a curious scene in which Richard perceives his name as separate from himself. Here, he urgently commands,
 (3.2.86) Rather than calling for his own armor, Richard asks his name to arm itself, as if it were a

defend his title, and here Richard tries to conceive himself as an entity separate from his title.

Richard, stripped of his crown, marvels that his face in the looking-glass seems utterly unchanged despite the momentous events which have taken place. (In this production, the mirror reflected in the polished gold of his crown, as both he and Bolingbroke held it between them.) Though his very sense of self has been compromised, his youthful reflection shows no signs of

followers in prosperity, / Thou dost -81) Richard feels as if his mirror and his own face has betrayed him, failing to reflect the devastating loss of selfhood he feels. In the most poignant moment of the play, he hurls the traitor glass to the ground, where it shatters and he proceeds to accuse the new king of destroying him. For me, this moment was more heart-

I was completely convinced by Eddie
 y, and

mawkishly. In this scene, Redmayne embodies indignation, rage, and agonized confusion, and I was pierced to the heart by his moving performance. For a king who is so aware of the performative aspect of his rule, Richard emotes his deep sense of loss with surprising honesty, a

Circle award for Best Shakespearean performance.

Afterwards, a large group of about ten of us had dinner at another fabulous Indian and required their own platters! (I have pictures to prove it!) We then headed back to central London to meet at Trafalgar Studios for our evening play, th *Huis*

Clos. Admittedly, I was pessimistic about the play because I tend to dislike anything existential, but the characters and their skillfully-played relationships proved gripping, and I came out of it with grudging admiration, mindful of the dangers of judging a play before seeing it.

***Huis Clos* (1943)**

ensures that he always has subjectivity; by refusing to interact with others, he denies them the opportunity to render him an object to be judged. But the others will not allow him such isolation. So he responds to their proddings by lashing out, and eventually gives as good as he gets. He alternately turns his romantic attentions to Estelle to torment Inez or withholds them to torment Estelle, whose greatest fear is being ignored (or unseen). The three are perfectly suited

After their confessions, each one noticeably refuses to repent; they cannot reflect on their actions sufficiently to bring themselves to true regret. Rather, they proudly declare their lack of regret, but hypocritically desire compassion from their peers. They wallow in their own self-pity, yet are completely incapable of projecting it outwards onto others, to turn a compassionate eye

(Sartre 369)

oneself especially a self so egotistical that it verges on solipsism. Hell is oneself, yet Sartre seems to suggest that Heaven can also lie within oneself if he could only productively bridge the space between self and others.

Cinderella (2011)

Friday, January 6

Director Christopher Dunham
Richmond Theatre

This morning, I napped before heading off with a large group to Richmond to see a *Cinderella* pantomime. It was by far our longest tube ride, one which was memorable for an unexpected power outage, which the conductor calmly announced to us. Apparently, this is a regular

series of responses from both actors and viewers. One example came in the form of a game in

Buttons started us off with a few practice rounds, the game quickly sped up when Buttons

monstrous spider. Unlike our earlier game with Buttons, here the audience is unsuccessful in helping the sisters, but we still receive a pay-preconditioned to dislike them for their cruelty to Cinderella.

A final and rather ingenious way that the production elicited audience participation was in its song selection. Rather than composing original songs, our company chose to use the melodies of recognizable pop and musical theater songs, replacing the original lyrics with ones relevant to the Cinderella plotline. I heard the familiar strains of popular artists like Rihanna, Cee Lo Green, and

The Lion King, Beauty

and the Beast, and musical theatre like *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Jekyll and Hyde*. The

simultaneous familiarity and novelty of such rewritten pop songs had an interesting effect. When the songs began, many of us turned to each other in either delight (at recognizing the song) or

confusion (, and m00095 122.3[()] TjB(y)30(BT)4(r y)30(i.)-8(e)-5 a04403}1004C>200005500520045305000

The Collaborators (2011)

Saturday, January 7

Director Nicholas Hytner**Cottesloe Theatre**

After so much action in the past few days, I was ready to have a quiet morning. After class, I spent a couple peaceful hours in a local bookstore just outside our hotel. I browsed, read, and having a quiet lunch at a nearby café. Disappointingly, *Billy Elliot*,⁸ which a group saw as their matinee show today, but Jon and I were lucky to snag tickets to the *Collaborators*, playing at the Cottesloe in the National Theater. I was interested in its depiction of Mikhail Bulgakov, a *The Master and Margarita*, and fell in love. (Incidental10 0 1 36g-3()] TJde fini

occurred as he was acting in his own play, foreshadows the drama interpretation of the overlapping of these scenes is perhaps that Bulgakov was thinking of his Molière play as the Doctor was drawing his blood, trying to anticipate the audience reaction to his new play or contemplating his sense of kinship with the French playwright. Given the presence of doctors and syringes in both scenes, perhaps Hodges was drawing our attention to the sanctioned yet intrusive ways in which government officials (like Soviet doctors and academics) invade th

a surreal staging of time and space, in which the dream space of nightmare collides and slowly becomes indistinguishable with reality. The simple but eye-catching set helps communicate this feeling of disorientation; its raised circular platform extends outwards in unpredictable zigs and zags, highlighted by its bold color scheme of red blazes on white. As in this scene, we would often see two scenes being played at once – the main one on the central platform and another, which would start on a lower level and make its way up to center stage. In this particular scene, it

assumed center stage with final speech did it consciously register as a separate artistic work.

allowing several of his different thoughts to occur simultaneously.

The separation but simultaneity of these thoughts are later exacerbated when Bulgakov is th birthday celebration. This decision engenders a deep sense of guilt within him because working for the ruthless dictator of the totalitarian USSR goes against everything that Bulgakov believes in. Then, he is approached by an unexpectedly affable Stalin who offers to switch places with him; Stalin will take his place at the typewriter to author his own biography in hilariously hagiographic tones while Bulgakov is

whimsical experiment is gradually revealed to be a Faustian pact, one which requires our hero to make decisions which will result in the mass exile or executions of political dissidents, people with whom Bulgakov shares an ideological kinship. While Bulgakov is initially opposed, Stalin charms him into it and our protagonist becomes a condoning, if reluctant, party to the Great

Twelfth Night (1601)

Director Indhu Rubasingham

New Diorama Theatre

I felt that the humorous characters in this production worked best, especially Malvolio, Maria,

and Feste. The forged letter worked particularly well. Gareth Fordred, who played Malvolio, recited his monologue almost directly to the audience. We were seated in the second row and he came so close that his sight line matched ours. At times, he met our eyes and

pantomiming the human trees behind them. This got a hearty laugh from the audience not only

But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day. (5.1.398-417)

conclusion would end the play. However, we got nothing of the sort; instead, the rapid pace of the first half slowed dramatically in the second half and the compelling plot of the shared dreams was largely abandoned in favor of a long-winded and heavy-handed political debate between the PM Ruth, Mark Crossley, and John.

What I found most compelling about the play were the ways in which theme of technology created its surreal, dream-like aura. The central figure of the play, an enormous blue cube (reminiscent of the Tardis!), served as any building which was needed to house the practical needs of the play for example, as the shop window into which Esther rammed her shopping -like dwelling,

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be interesting to think about in the context of the next play, in which Lee Hall asserts his opinions on culture.) But simultaneously, this collective consciousness, like the blue box, can entrap and restrict freer, more individualized

lost, Lloyd keeps shelling out cash for new ones and the bouquets keep multiplying onstage. Their increasingly grotesque profusion echoes the inevitably quickening spiral of chaos that eventually spills over visibly onto the stage of *Nothing On*. In one memorable instance, Tim has

ons and his loss of control were, for me, among the funniest aspects of the play.

***One Man, Two Guvnors* (2010)** Wednesday, January 11
Inspired by the play *Servant of Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni
Director Nicholas Hytner
Adelphi Theatre

Dong and I started off the day by visiting the British Library, where we hoped to see the Magna Carta and the illuminated manuscripts.

a number of interesting exhibits, but we were in a bit of a rush. On our way out, we stopped by

seriously unde

We then met up with Katie in Chinatown for an amazing lunch at a Japanese restaurant. Completely full, we had to hustle through the West End to get to the Adelphi Theater for our matinee.

Besides *Noises Off*, *One Man, Two Guvnors* was easily the funniest play we saw. It certainly defied my expectations of what West End theater comprises. Although I have some background in Italian literature, what I know about *commedia dell'arte* never seen any *commedia dell'arte* plays. And while I knew this type of play is popular (as opposed to high art) and involves improvisation, I was not prepared for just how much lowbrow humor and improvisatory freedom I saw onstage. The wO33 Tm[Tm[(g)10(e)4(t t)-3(o)] TJETBT1 0 0 1 114.2

laughing and applauding along with the audience, and obviously enjoying the fresh hijinks that were ensuing with a new audience participant. It was a lovely moment, showing that the performers themselves enjoy each show as much as first time viewers do.

After this highly entertaining show, we headed to our University

back against Miss Trun . Unlike the character in the book, Matilda conjures up for herself a fantastical genealogy which eventually proves to be true, albeit not for herself, but for her supportive teacher, Miss Honey.

spent during her time in the library where she not only digests books by the dozens, but also becomes a storyteller herself. The tales she tells Mrs. Phelps, the local librarian, all involve the thrilling adventures of a husband-and-wife team of circus performers – a handsome escapologist and a lovely acrobat – who only want to have a child, but are unable to conceive. In despair, they –defying stunt which combines both of their specialized skills. But just before their performance, the acrobat discovers that she has successfully conceived

cruel Trunchbull-like sister who is involved in the business of their trade, balks at the idea of lifetime imprisonment. They are forced to go through with the risky stunt.

Matilda narrates this scene so dramatically that Mrs. Phelps almost cannot distinguish the story from real life

. Up to this point, the escapo

comes time to show the death-defying stunt itself, the live actors are replaced by shadow puppets. The foreground of the stage, where Matilda and Mrs. Phelps sit, is darkened, and the background lit by a great spotlight. Within this spotlight, we see the enormous exaggerated silhouettes of the escapologist and acrobat performing their aerodynamic feat. The effect of using shadows reinforces the imaginative nature of this story – these are broadly-sketched, numinous ghosts, conjured up in the mind of a five-year-old, rather than real flesh-and-blood people. That the shadows are placed literally above the heads of Matilda and Mrs. Phelps also has a cartoon-like effect, resembling a sort of thought bubble that one might see in a comic strip. The stunt to the ground.

is frozen in a spread-eagle position, her fall represented by a series of spiraling circles drawn around her, and punctuated by music. She is badly injured and survives only long enough to give

escapologist is so paralyzed by his overwhelming grief for his dead wife that he neglects his daughter. She is roundly abused and tormented by her aunt, until she finally breaks down and cries in her bedroom one night. At this point, fiction and re m

vituperation. This is an important moment for Matilda because she directly, defiantly speaks the truth to Trunchbull, instead of using language more indirectly to create fictional narratives. When Trunchbull venomously turns her abuse onto Matilda, the child retreats into her mind,

Just that still sort of quiet
Like the sound of a page being turned in a book,

Matilda implies that this is the same part of her precocious mind that empowers her to tell

conscious

power that she suddenly discovers a new dimension to her mental faculties. Just as her imagined parents were miraculously blessed with a child at their moment of greatest despair, Matilda discovers telekinetic powers in the moment of her greatest victimization. By willing harm towards Trunchbull, she is able to tip over a pitcher of water containing a newt (put there by her mischievous friend Lavender) into Miss Honey's face and gives her enemy a nasty shock.

This is a turning point for both Matilda and Miss Honey. While they have sympathized

Honey. Order is restored as the older woman becomes a mother figure for the younger girl, and it is implied Matilda will finally be able to experience a normal childhood.

Comedy of Errors (1589?)

Thursday, January 12

Director Dominic Cooke
Olivier Theater

Today began with a bit of a disappointment for me. I (and a number of others) had been considering going to the *Doctor Who* Experience in Hammersmith, just a few tube stops away. I had even found discount fliers at the National Gallery! We had the morning off because we were

Comedy of Errors, was notable for its modernized setting and innovative use of music. Both of these elements contributed to a pervasive sense of an urban nightmare, which effectively reflected the increasingly agitated mental state of nearly all the main characters. In fact, this play strikes me as a living illustration something he perceives is simultaneously familiar and foreign. Ephesus, staged as a dodgy downtown city which has seen better days, provides an intimidating new setting for Antipholus of Syracuse to navigate on his quest to find his long-lost brother. Antipholus is baffled by the royal treatment he receives from complete strangers who approach him as if he were an old friend. This is, of course, because he is being mistaken for his twin Antipholus of Ephesus, who has established himself as a successful and sociable merchant in town. At first, Antipholus of Syracuse is put off by this surprisingly warm welcome, but once he experiences some of the accompanying material gain (a golden chain, a sumptuous dinner, the attentions of an attractive woman), we see him beginning to milk his lucky circumstances, buying into the absurdity of his

(2.2.184-

5). His lines highlight the surrealism here; even though she treats him familiarly, intimately, his certainly is not. He is physically attracted to her and thus decides to stop resisting: What error

86-88). He allows himself to be seduced by Luciana, portrayed as a delightfully ditzy bottle blonde, who lives with her sister Adriana in glamorous high rise a la Beverly Hills.

The setting highlights these absurd elements as the two brothers retrace their steps through the narrow streets of the city, but encounter unexpected results with every repetition. If Antipholus of Syracuse lives the dream, Antipholus of Ephesus—who has the bad luck of arriving home later (after all his acquaintances have done business with his brother)—is stuck in a nightmare of accusations, denial, betrayal, and unmerited punishment. As the two brothers are slowly grows to encompass his brother in its chaos. The mayhem culminates in a frenetic chase scene, in which Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus are pursued by Dr. Pinch, a physician and apparently part-time exorcist, who has been enlisted by Luciana to cure her mad husband. The white-coated Dr. Pinch and his swarm of orderlies all armed with scalpels and syringes, evoke the image of a mad doctor hunting down his equally mad patients in an insane asylum. Adding to the confusion is the presence of the other

witnessed Dr. Peck outstripping all of us in his purchases. He must have bought a suitcase worth of books!

The play itself, the dramatic *Haunted Child*, proved to be much less cheerful. One of its main themes, the need to find some sort of transcendental belief in our materialistic world, reminded me of *Dublin Carol*, Molière's *The Misanthrope* (which I saw last semester in Stratford, Ontario), and most of all of *13*. In the first two plays, a character who has lost faith in his world recedes into his own mind and isolates himself from what he perceives as a flawed society, a solution that in both cases ultimately fails. *Haunted Child* and *13* both try a different route, by seeking solutions in the external world, and by reaching out to others. In *13*, the disillusioned characters largely turn to the vaguely messianic figure of John or, more frequently, to technology as a means of connecting to an increasingly fragmented society. *Haunted Child* seems to offer a vision of what happens when one tries to find a happy medium between the two extremes (of utter isolation on the one hand, and plugging into a super-system to connect with everybody, on the other). Douglas, a discontent husband and father, attempts to find meaning in his life by joining a religious group, which supposedly began with similar discontents. When he suddenly comes home and reveals to his wife, Julie, what he has been doing, Douglas sounds like a dupe for taking up with crazy cult. The group forces him into such masochistic behaviors as consenting to have his teeth surgically removed without anesthetic and purging his body of toxins by drinking enormous quantities of salt-water, which forces him to vomit. But as irrational as these practices sound to us, they fit the view that many religions take of the human body as a distracting, sometimes even evil, form whose fleshly desires for food, alcohol, or sex divert our attention f

primitive, recalling the taxes that peasants were forced to pay to the Catholic church in medieval times. In the end, Douglas returns to his wife, his clothes torn and his face bruised, and begs to be taken back into the family. It is implied, then, that his religious group rejected him once they like the Church of Scientology to be as bankrupt of true faith as any profit-motivated corporation on Wall Street.

Thomas, than with his father. He is caught in the crossfire between his parents, who have polar opposite views on how to raise him. Julie, the (understandably) overprotective mother, tries to shelter Thomas from all bad news. In the beginning when Douglas has been missing for a few weeks, she tells her son that his father is simply on a business trip and will soon return. In reality, Douglas has been holed up in the attic (unbeknownst to his wife) and sneaks downstairs periodically to spy

Thomas, unfortunately, has glimpsed him

e a

narrative in his head to make sense of the contradictory facts; thus, he comes up with a tale in which his father has died in a car crash involving a bus and is now haunting him at night. On another occasion, Thomas sneaks out of his room during the night, only to hear his mother and his newly-returned father having sex in an adjacent room. Screams of pleasure echo from behind the closed door, but the child who is ignorant of the sex act reads this incoming sensory information negatively. He thinks that his father is beating his mother, and he allows us to see his fear in an equally frightful way by lighting his face from underneath with a powerful flashlight, an image drawn from countless horror movies.

Douglas insists that he try it. Not understanding this idea of purgation, Thomas only seems to absorb the self-

untrue) desire for death. And this is

that repeatedly emerges in his drawings and conversations with his mother. It is ironic that when Douglas is searching for a spiritual rebirth, all that his child can glean from his behavior is a desire for self-annihilation. For me, this issue of child-rearing was the most provocative part of the play. How can one be expected to raise healthy, well-

even know what oneself believes? Would Douglas and Julie have been better off adhering to

contradictory

worldviews when he is older?

ame is an allusion to Thomas the Apostle, sometimes known as

seems confused by the multiple, often contradictory, stories circulating around him. He has much to be skeptical of. But just as Thomas the Apostle eventually found his faith in Christ, our

Thomas seems to find some semblance of resolution in his unconditional love for his parents.

After his final, surprisingly candid conversation with Julie, in which she

have all the answers but cares deeply for Thomas, they share a warm embrace. They seem to have reached a point where they could conceivably carry on their lives without Douglas. But

only moments later, a beaten-up Douglas barges in, begging for forgiveness; he kneels and locks

significantly, who shakes off his shock and steps forward to put a compassionate hand on his

& Claude-
Inspired by the novel by Victor Hugo
Directors Trevor Nunn and John Caird

Les Misérables (1985) Saturday, January 14

This morning, after our final class, we presented Dr. Peck with a thank-you gift. It was a nineteenth-century book of essays discussing scientific concepts as if they were fairy tales. Jess found it in a local bookstore. Given its lovely appearance—a green hardback with a gold-embossed cover, gilded pages, and authentic dedication, it was a real bargain. We all covertly chipped in a couple pounds to pay for the book. I also wanted to get a card for everyone to sign, and when I proposed it, Sara responded with the great idea that we could make one ourselves. So, Laurel volunteered to do an amazing sketch of the famous London landmarks & mascots of seen, and everyone signed our homemade card. (The card can be viewed on the online version of our syllabus.) Dr. Peck seemed surprised and delighted

One of the ways in which the nine or ten main characters of *Les Misérables* are revolutionary France, the ways in which people choose to identify themselves can mean the difference between life and death. As these characters struggle to form coherent self-conceptions, we can hear their anguish in both the lyrics and musical leitmotifs that come to define them. *Les Misérables* is at its most ingenious when it recycles its own music, resurrecting familiar leitmotifs in different contexts, different keys, or for different characters so that one iconic melody, through repetition, comes to have multiple significations. One of the effects of this same-but-relevant, sometimes even mirrored, in other characters who are also struggling to define themselves.

I want to look, in particular, at the character of Inspector Javert. In the beginning, Jean Valjean has just been released from a twenty-year prison sentence for stealing a loaf of bread, a crime he committed and for which he had served his time. Javert, his parole officer, fanatically enforces the letter of the law, believing in its divinity. To him, Valjean is, always was, and continues to be a criminal; he habitually identifies Valjean not by name, but by his prisoner number: 24601. This conception of identity is both his and everyone

eyes, that this condition is fixed, and cannot be altered.

expectations because his yellow ticket-of-leave, which he is required to have on his person, identifies him as a criminal and thus, unemployable. Driven to desperation, Valjean takes advantage of an old bishop who has kindly offered him a free meal, and steals his silver. When he is captured by the police and brought back for sentencing, the bishop unexpectedly

nothing but release Valjean. Afterwards, a stunned Valjean can only listen as the bishop

become a new man. He successfully emerges eight years later as Monsieur Madeleine, the mayor of a city and a wealthy factory owner.

The distinctive melodies associated with this song are later reproduced almost exactly in camp as a government spy, has been caught and held prisoner. Valjean, who is also at the nemeses, Javert resigns himself to death, believing that Valjean will act accordingly to the law (or the Old Law of revenge), and kill him for betraying the revolutionary cause. Instead, Valjean re- frees Javert. Shocked, Javert reconsiders the rules on which he has built his life; he has always acted according to the letter of the law, and never once considered sparing someone out of compassion. He was prepared to die within this neat system law and, moreover, with no thought for his own benefit, befuddles Javert. Unlike Valjean, he cannot see an alternative way of living; his causes such a rift in J -conception that he annihilates himself, committing suicide, rather than sacrificing his integrity to re-conceptualize his identity and values. Boubilil and Schönberg brought

He treated me like any other;
He gave me his trust.
He called me brother.
My life he claims for God above.
Can such things be?
For I had come to hate the world
This world that always hated me.

Take an eye for an eye!
Turn your heart into stone!

This is all I have lived

This desperate man whom I have hunted?
He gave me my life.
He gave me freedom.
I should have perished by his hand.
It was his right.
It was my right to die as well.
Instead I

And my thoughts fly apart
Can this man be believed?

himself; he focuses on what he is (the Lawg84/nd what he is not (Valjean). He has built his entire self4/round being the opposite of the criminal Valjean and now cannot conceive that they might both share desirable qualities.

The third stanza, for me, is the most telling. It shows both men reacting to an act of mercy. Musically, it demonstr/tes this shift in thought by slowing down from the frenzied recitative and its melody is softened with the addition of legato strings; we also he/r a modulation into a major key, indicating a more contemplative and productive mode of thought. Valjean thinks in spiritual terms

hand, sees

kindness that has the potential bring two men into brotherhood, but r/ther a power play, which

Javert spe/ks

and unable to conceive of4/ world in which an individual might act without recourse to the law. Javert understands how to treat upstanding citizens who follow the law and criminals who act against the law, but someone who acts without reference to any law absolutely baffles him. For him, such a world that allows4/ topsy-turvy hierarchy is a sense of4/n unstable world is echoed in the orchestr/tion with a flood of tremolo strings and

] course and [their] aim / And each in their season / returns and returns / and is

loss of faith.

Both men characterize the despair that accompanies the death of their respective identities with words about darkness and void. Music/lly, the fin/l verse is set apart from the others with a substantial rest in which silence reigns; when the voices re-enter, they sound in a slow recitative and has reverted to the same minor key in which the song began. Ultimately, both

by a background of delicate tremolo strings and punctuated with eerily-echoing cymbals. But while Valje

will allow his only escape to be literal self-annihilation, suicide.

tearing up of his yellow ticket-of-leave which marks him as a parolee; simultaneously, horns

Follies. The scene he

s:

I'm up among the stars
 On earthly things I frown.
 I'm throwing off the bars
 that held me down.
 I'll pay the piper
 When times are riper.
 Just now, I shan't
 Because you see I'm dancing and
 I can't be bothered now.

Gifted with an active imagination, Bobby breaks into song when he falls in love with Polly. Again, the scene takes place entirely in his head. Lying in the dust and nearly dying of thirst from his trek into the Nevada desert, Bobby awakens during a conversation between Polly and Lank, the owner of the local saloon. The moment he wakes up, we are drawn into his consciousness. At the exact instant he sees Polly and falls in love, all action onstage freezes, just
 else, and the

on my head or anything / Don't think that I've lost my senses / It's just that my happiness finally
 ality of love which makes men lose their senses, and
 celebrates this irrationality by inhabiting this mental space in which there is nothing else but the

fa

to the smitten Bobby and, oblivious of his presence, she converses with Lank. Bobby is not the only character to experience the madness of love. Polly, a spun impersonation of Zangler, and she later performs a seductive song in which she comes onto him. Her love-

by her serenading of the wrong man, Zangler himself, rather than Bobby. Her blissful condition of being in love drives her to act out of character; she is ostentatiously physical in her

touching Zangler,

kissing him,

Yee

Final Thoughts:

-six plays in the past few days! That number is mind-boggling to me. I cannot choose a single favorite, although there have been a number of truly unforgettable plays, namely *War Horse*, *Hamlet*, *Jerusalem*, *The Collaborators*, *Pitmen Painters*, *Noises Off*, and *Matilda*

similarity between them; rather, I think the fact that they are so different in genre, narrative structure, and aesthetics speaks to the overall quality of theater in London and, of course, Dr. taste. I enjoyed myself immensely on this trip.

the shows. Part of its joy was the opportunity I had to meet so many warm and welcoming students. I was pleasantly surprised to find that so many were non-English majors. It made our class sessions that much more interesting; listening to people familiar with theatre certainly brought a new perspective to my play-going experience and made me consider aspects of theater thought about before. This trip has proven to be one of those rare experiences

two-and-a-half weeks where I have the privilege of doing nothing but seeing high quality shows, thinking about theater, and exploring London.

with the faintest interest in theater. I feel very lucky to have had the chance to participate in such a wonderful experience. Thank you, Dr. Peck and Ruth, for all you have done to organize this trip! Your knowledge, energy, and unwavering enthusiasm are truly remarkable, and helped to make my stay in London an amazing experience.